

Northern Ireland launches digital health diagnostics programme

NIPACS+ will support the creation of regional networks of care and will help the region to transform diagnostic services, as healthcare professionals benefit from a single point of access to medical images.

The Health and Social Care service in Northern Ireland is to transform how diagnostic services are delivered, as it brings together millions of crucial digital patient images into a single system, provided by medical imaging technology partner Sectra.

The programme, called NIPACS+, follows a contract signed in July 2022, and will see every trust across Northern Ireland break down silos of imaging information, to help enhance care and support timely diagnoses for patients throughout the region.

It builds on over a decade of work in the original Digital Archiving programme 'NIPACS' with Sectra's solution, that has allowed the HSC to digitise and connect its radiology and pathology services and represents an estimated capital investment of £50m.

In one single imaging system, Northern Ireland's HSC healthcare professionals will be able to access and interact with patient images from a wide range of disciplines, including radiology, cardiology, oncology, obstetrics, endoscopy, medical photography, nuclear medicine, dental and ophthalmology. Images from any hospital will be available throughout the region for secondary consultations, and cooperation, leading to enhanced patient care as well as reduced cost and increased efficiency.

The NIPACS+ programme directly responds to a large number of recommendations in a 2018 Northern Ireland Department of Health strategic framework for imaging services, that set out to transform how imaging services are planned and provided. It called for NIPACS to be expanded into new clinical areas, and for a single radiology information system and picture archiving communication system to be available across all acute sites, integrated with Northern Ireland's care record systems.

Procured by Northern Ireland's Business Services Organisation (BSO), the programme will draw on the entirety of Sectra's enterprise imaging technology suite. It will enable Northern Ireland to manage approximately two million examinations per year.

NIPACS+ will integrate into Health and Social Care's 'encompass' initiative, that is delivering an integrated digital care record across Northern Ireland, making imaging easily available at the point of care.

The initiative will also support the creation of "enhanced clinical networks", called for in the 2018 framework. Regional networks of care focussed around specialities such as cardiology and obstetrics, are expected to make better use of scarce specialist expertise and to help to standardise and improve access to imaging services for patients across Northern Ireland.

Patients being transferred to different hospitals, will also benefit from staff having immediate access to imaging captured at other sites. And specialist sites, for example, the major trauma centre or neurology unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital, will be able to review images more easily before patients arrive, in some cases informing decisions on where best to treat a patient.

The programme will support the creation of diagnostic hubs and the development of training facilities. Workforce flexibility, and the ability for healthcare diagnosticians to report on images captured anywhere in the region, will be complemented by home reporting capabilities, which is

expected to support recruitment and retention as well as workload balancing across Northern Ireland.

Jane Rendall, managing director for Sectra in the UK and Ireland, said: “Northern Ireland is an example for the world in integrated diagnostics. NIPACS has already delivered so much, digitising radiology and more recently pathology, and the benefits delivered are about to be extended and accelerated for more healthcare professionals and their patients across the region. This is an extremely exciting project for Sectra to support.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

Additional reference, including quotes from stakeholders at the Department for Health, BSO and Belfast Trust can be taken from the attached link [Advanced digital imaging archive to improve patient outcomes | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

About Business Services Organisation (BSO) - The Business Services Organisation was established to provide a broad range of regional business support functions and specialist professional services to the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland. Part of his business support includes the management of Health and Social Care Programmes and Projects such as NIPACS and Digital Pathology – Link: <https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/pathologyni.htm>

About NIPACS

Northern Ireland has six HSC Trusts, five of which produce imaging: the Belfast, South Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern Trusts. These Trusts provide a wide range of integrated health and social care services for a population of 1.8 million covering a geographical area of 14,000km². Imaging Services are vital in the provision of modern healthcare in Northern Ireland. There are more than 1.75 million radiology examinations carried out by HSCNI annually.

The original Northern Ireland Picture Archiving and Communications System (NIPACS) contract was awarded to Sectra UK Ltd in 2008 covering 28 out of the 30 hospital sites in Northern Ireland. This solution includes a RIS, PACS and VNA. It currently stores and provides access on a single platform to the following speciality types: radiology, dental, breast screening, obstetrics, limited cardiology, and medical photography.

About Sectra

With more than 30 years of innovation and approaching 2,000 installations worldwide, Sectra is a leading global provider of imaging IT solutions that support healthcare in achieving patient-centric care. Sectra offers an enterprise imaging solution that provides a unified strategy for all imaging needs while lowering operational costs. The scalable and modular solution, with a VNA at its core, allows healthcare providers to grow from ology to ology and from enterprise to enterprise. Visit Sectra's website to read more about Sectra and why it's top-ranked in '[Best in KLAS](#)'.