

Written evidence submitted by eConsult (DDA0018)

Introduction:

- The following is eConsult's response to the Science and Technology Committee's inquiry into digital data.
- In anticipation of the Committee's meeting to discuss the findings of the inquiry, we would welcome the opportunity to present to the committee at any further evidence sessions that the committee might hold.
- We are also happy to submit any further information that may assist with this inquiry and provide oral evidence.

About eConsult:

- In 2013, four innovative GP Partners at the Hurley Group in South East London (Dr Clare Gerada, Dr Arvind Madan, Dr Murray Ellender and Dr Mark Ashworth) pioneered the delivery of the first online consultation. They wanted technology to help them work smarter and quickly grew to become the NHS's leading online consultation provider. eConsult is now live in over 3,200 NHS GP practices and 9 Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) settings across the UK. eConsult aims to be the digital front door to healthcare, assessing patient need quickly and safely, routing patients to the right place, at the right time, connecting health delivery systems to improve how we look after patients.
- eConsult enables NHS-based GP practices to offer online consultations to their patients. This allows patients to submit their symptoms or requests to their own GP electronically and offers round-the-clock NHS self-help information, signposting to services, and a symptoms checker.
- eConsult is the most widely used digital triage tool in NHS primary care, built by NHS GPs for NHS patients, designed to enhance patient access, improve practice efficiency, and signpost patients to the right place at the right time for their care.
- Over 20m eConsults have been submitted to date and eConsult has used its clinical knowledge and digital triage expertise to develop digital triage platforms for Secondary Care A&E Departments and Outpatients, providing the benefits of digital triage in over 10 NHS Trusts
- With a footprint in Primary Care, Urgent and Emergency Care and Outpatients, and fully integrated into EPR systems, eConsult is in the unique position to be able to offer an integrated digital triage ecosystem across the 3 main doors into healthcare, driving substantial benefits in efficiencies, outcomes and savings.

Submission response:

The potential benefits, including to research, to effectively use and share data between and across Government, other public bodies, research institutions and commercial organisations, and the existing barriers to such data sharing

Data Science, combined with other technological advances, has enormous potential for improving the healthcare industry. The industry is one of the most striking beneficiaries of data sciences. Its success will depend on the ability to securely share this data. By building a system of trust that allows the efficient flow of personal healthcare information, the integration of health data creates new opportunities for health modelling, disease prevention and a more holistic patient-centric support system.

Using digital capabilities to redesign care, such as delivering integrated care and using population health data to drive predictive interventions, offers the opportunity to improve

health outcomes over the short, medium, and longer term. Ultimately, the aim should be to ensure people can access appropriate health and care services consistently as and when they need to, in a way that meets their needs.

As the digitisation of domiciliary and social care delivery continues to develop, access to richer data sets will enable Health Care Providers to plan and deliver care more effectively.

There is a need to legislate for better data access, interoperability and protection. This framework should encourage and facilitate the safe sharing of data, supporting both individual patients and population health approaches, keeping patients at the centre.

There should be an opportunity to blend national interoperability with local autonomy. Taking a wider population health perspective will require much greater coordination on local initiatives with the wider health and wellbeing focus of ICSs.

The present siloed health systems are not adapted to the necessary level of reconfiguration of services – a collaborative approach to Integrated Care System working is required. Moving from a simple aggregation of silos to a more integrated population health system is dependent on an effective and well-thought digitisation and interoperability strategy, which is important for improving patient outcomes and driving system efficiency.

The interaction between social care, primary care and acute care is not as efficient as it has the potential to be. Emergency admission and discharge processes would all hugely benefit from greater system-wide collaboration enabled by shared records, improved processes, and data-enabled planning. Digital capabilities should be used to design care such as delivering integrated care and using population health data to drive predictive interventions.

There are a number of barriers facing public health data sharing. These include technical, economic, political, legal and ethical. The interaction between barriers to data sharing in public health is complex, and single solutions to single barriers are unlikely to succeed. Too often, arguments focus on the barriers, rather than the benefits.

The NHS is unique in its potential for data, with cradle to grave population health management under one single healthcare system. This provides huge opportunity for an ethical and innovative approach to data. At eConsult, we stand ready to work with the NHS to leverage this data for direct patient benefit through our new form of online consultations, and help the UK become a model example for ethical and safe data use.

However, one key challenge is the plethora of systems and lack of integration between these across the NHS estate. This makes it difficult for small innovative companies to deliver integrated innovative solutions, without an open access API model. Another key challenge is data sharing across NHS organisations, and a central approach by NHSE to work with trusted partners on data access and data sharing would deliver significant benefit to patients.

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