Reducing healthcare inequalities and enhancing the NHS

Reducing health inequality means giving all individuals an equal chance to live a long and healthy life, regardless of who they are or where they live.

We know that 2020 has been a year like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed unprecedented challenges on our health service and has disproportionately affected people who live in the most deprived areas, further exacerbating health and social inequalities.

Philips firmly believes that advances in medical technologies, diagnostics and therapies offer an opportunity for the 66 million people living in the UK to live longer, healthier lives.

With this in mind, Philips is outlining recommendations that could help to improve the health of the nation, reduce inequalities and enhance the NHS.

Recommended Actions for Reducing Healthcare Inequalities and Enhancing the NHS

1. Expand Rapid Access Pathways to significantly reduce patient diagnosis time

- Invest in straight to testing referrals for GPs – including through telehealth programmes – to significantly reduce the time to reach patient diagnosis.
- Support GP direct access to diagnostics for suspected cancer, helping reduce the backlog of patients requiring urgent investigations, as a result of COVID-19. Rapid Access Pathways should also be opened up for patients suffering from conditions that have a significant impact on quality of life and workplace performance, such as sleep apnoea.
- The use of Rapid Access Pathways for patients to access diagnostics for suspected cancer is supported by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as cost effective and will reduce the time to reach a diagnosis and commence treatment.

2. Expand diagnostic capacity through Community Diagnostic Centres

- Rapidly establish new pathways to diagnosis through a network of elective Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs), providing access to diagnostic and treatment services closer to patient's homes.
- Encourage pathways to diagnosis through CDCs that minimise contact with secondary care facilities focussed on the treatment of COVID and established non-COVID illnesses
- Accelerate the growth of local diagnostic centres by utilising available space on the High Street, in order to increase patient access while reducing the burden on acute hospital sites.
  - Professor Sir Mike Richards' Independent Review of Diagnostic Services for NHS England highlighted that CDCs are needed to accommodate the major expansion in diagnostic services required over the next five years, particularly as potential for expansion on acute hospital sites is very limited.

3. Extend the capacity of radiology and pathology hubs to streamline and bolster patient care

- Back the introduction of regional radiology and pathology 'hubs' supported by state-of-the-art digital technology to improve the quality, efficiency and safety of care delivered to the NHS.
- Encourage the roll out of hubs through improved funding at a regional level, for example through Integrated Care Systems (ICS) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).
- Establish state-of-the-art AI-enabled remote Radiology Command Centre's to optimise radiology operations and resources.
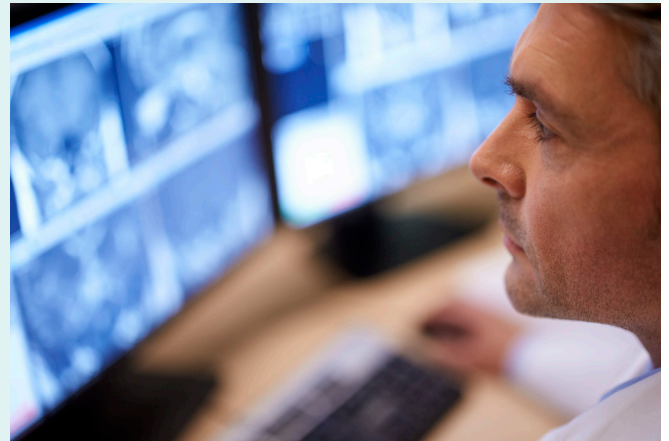
4. Increase research and investment into the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in our healthcare system to increase efficiencies

- Support further research and development into the use of AI diagnostic and decision-support systems in order to drive medium-and long-term benefits in the quality and cost of care provision in the NHS.
- Encourage the NHS to scale the adoption of existing technology in order to increase clinical efficiency and safety as part of the NHS Long Term Plan.
- Embrace the UK's unique global position and capitalise on the rich data held by the NHS to become a global leader in AI and automated technologies.

[1] https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BM2025Pu-item-5-diagnostics-recovery-and-renewal.pdf

5. Deliver better co-ordinated patient care through greater data integration

- Enhance patient trust through the efficient and safe sharing of patient information as the industry and NHS aims for greater interoperability.

- Ensure clinicians can benefit from digital systems that operate to their fullest potential, with efficient sharing of accurate patient information between providers and settings.

- Introduce a targeted, data-driven approach to interoperability and data sharing within provider networks that commonly share patients, representing a cost-effective approach to improving care integration.

6. Capitalise on opportunities to advance digital transformation at the primary care level to greater support patients

- Establish a Primary Care Practice Digital Exemplar Programme, providing a central fund of £10m to support Primary Care practices in accelerating their digital transformation journey.

- Support participating Primary Care Digital Exemplar Practices to become national leaders in the use of digital services, including telehealth, digital prescribing, online services and digitally supported therapies.

- Foster a culture of knowledge sharing where participating practices can impart their learning and experiences with other practices, supporting the scaling up of appropriate and effective digital transformation of primary care services.

- The Primary Care Digital Exemplar Practice Programme could be administered at a national, regional, or local (e.g. CCG) level, with funding accessed via a competitive application process.

7. Develop new methods of partnerships between industry and the NHS to improve patient outcomes

- Set out new methods of partnerships between the NHS and industry partners that go far beyond a transaction relationship, in order to better support the needs of patients and deliver improved patient outcomes.

- Work with industry partners to ensure that novel technologies are adopted quickly by clinicians, backed up by a robust training programme that will allow patients to experience their benefits at an earlier stage.

- Support greater collaboration between industry partners and the NHS to better process engineer solutions to existing problems within healthcare systems in the UK, an area of expertise in many industries that has previously been underappreciated in healthcare.