

Health and Social Care post-COVID-19: the ABC of change

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The current crisis has highlighted many aspects of our society that weren't previously high in the public's consciousness; the amazing work of the NHS being the most obvious. Our national pride in our health service has been matched only by the demonstrations of gratitude to those whose dedication to saving lives is astounding. It has also brought the focus onto social care, both residential and domiciliary, with much needed recognition of how much more we need to value and respect these services. A third learning point for me has been the speed at which we are able to adopt new working practices if it becomes imperative to do so. I am thinking, of course, about how quickly we have seen technology adopted in healthcare over the last few weeks. Initiatives such as remote health monitoring which would previously have taken months to put in place have been operational within 2-3 weeks.

For over 60 years Tunstall has led the way as provider of innovative Connect Care and Connected Health Solutions. Our person-centred solutions support vulnerable people with a range of monitoring solutions and services, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year, aimed at assisting their health and wellbeing and providing vital support as and when needed. Our technology helps to mitigate the risks of many common challenges, such as falls, deteriorating health and social isolation.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis we have been working with local authorities to help them support people who are shielding at home, using technology to offer them constant reassurance, and a means to easily get help in an emergency, as well as supporting their wellbeing with proactive calling. We've also provided specialist communication solutions to nightingale care homes that have been recommissioned to provide a step-down facility between hospitals and residential care.

Our remote health monitoring solutions are empowering people with long term conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease to manage their conditions at home with support from local clinicians. Remote monitoring is also being deployed in care homes to monitor the health of residents, identifying any symptoms at an early stage, enabling swift interventions. It's also giving support to children with eating disorders unable to attend clinic as they normally would, providing them with continuing support on their care journey.

As much as the pandemic has brought immense pressure to bear on our healthcare system, it has also resulted in unprecedented acceleration in the adoption of technology, and, just as importantly, the new models of care delivery that make the tech a success. After years, if not decades, of debating the ways we can make our health and care systems more agile and sustainable, it is vital that we don't lose the gains we've made as a result of the crisis.

I believe we need an ABC approach to change:

AVAILABILITY

Is it Accessible and are people Aware?

One of the major barriers to mainstream adoption of technology in health and care has been a lack of awareness of what is available, how it can be applied and the benefits. And as technology continues to advance, we need to build this into not only the way we train healthcare professionals, but also their continued development. Its adoption needs to be integrated across the health and social care landscape, with safe and secure data access and flow, to ensure person-centred care and a coordinated approach.

BENEFIT

It has to be a collective benefit – IDEALLY everyone's

We need to do more to evidence the benefits of embedding technology into pathways, from a qualitative and quantitative perspective. Tunstall has seen clear improvements in both outcomes and the patient experience, as well as significant cost avoidance, but the difficulty in health and care of who pays and who gains remains a challenge under the current system.

COLLABORATION

A very complex environment

Anyone who has worked in health and/or social care recognises the complexity of the structure. Any new initiative will require both a push and pull mechanism to create the impetus for transformation, which may well require statutory powers, specifically for Integrated Care Systems. However, our new world is showing a willingness to collaborate and an appetite for change, which has previously been lacking, and this may well prove to be the key to breaking down the silos and creating a 'healthcare' system.

The value of the NHS to our nation is obvious, it is "our jewel in the crown", but I am equally glad to see an acknowledgement of the need for far greater attention and focus on social care within our Population Health Management strategy. If we can harness the current spirit of collaboration and innovation, the pandemic may yet prove to be the turning point in the UK's health and care systems.