Health and Sport Committee: Technology and Innovation in the NHS

Healthcare Improvement Scotland response

Thank you for the opportunity to provide views on the Committee’s inquiry into technology and innovation in the NHS.

As the Committee will be aware, Healthcare Improvement Scotland has a number of parts and functions, all of them helping to deliver our aim of better quality health and social care for everyone in Scotland.

A number of our functions relate to, or rely upon, technologies and innovation. In particular, we provide evidence and share knowledge that enables people to get the best out of the services that they use and helps services to improve. This includes providing independent advice on the value of technologies, through the Scottish Health Technologies Group (SHTG). We also have a unique role in supporting the safer use of medicines across Scotland, many aspects of which rely on digital support and new ways of working. Our Scottish Health Council function also offers insight into the public perspective on, and engagement with, technologies.

We also work to help health and social care organisations to redesign and continuously improve services and provide quality assurance that gives people confidence in the quality and sustainability of services. The Committee will be aware of the ‘technology enabled care’ initiatives across Scotland and the growing international literature and evidence base for this work across health and social care, many aspects of which our Improvement Hub (ihub) increasingly relies upon.

Rather than respond to each of the specific questions included in the call for views, our response focuses on the work of the SHTG with a particular focus on barriers to innovation in health and social care.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland is represented on the Health and Social Care Digital Strategy Oversight Group. We welcome the approach being taken by Scottish Government in the development of the Digital Health and Social Care Strategy, not least the international experts engaged in advising Scotland. We believe that this external view is crucial to developing our approach to technology and innovation to ensure our strategy is fit for the 21st century.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland recognises the essential nature of digital support for new ways of working and looks forward to further engagement on this agenda. We recognise that the successful implementation of this agenda will entail both technical and adaptive change.
There are issues surrounding the use of technology which need to be considered, including:

1. **Safety and accreditation of mobile apps.** The public are increasingly using health technologies that are available to download and access on mobile devices. There is a gap in Scotland in there is no accreditation process and therefore their safety cannot be assured.

2. **Experience versus evidence.** There is a growing evidence base around ‘patient-centred’ technologies however the international evidence base around ‘what works where and when’ remains less than clear. There are many technical claims that have yet to be proven to be scaleable e.g. many aspects of telehealth. We therefore encourage a systematic approach to the emerging literature and ensuring that a robust evidence base is used to inform investments in digital and innovation.

3. **Evaluation of early evidence.** The need for robust data around what can be scaled-up should be balanced with the need to have willingness in the system (i.e. decision-making structures) to consider early evidence; it is too easy to dismiss or not act upon promising results. There will of course need to be a certain level of rigour to a decision making process, which is discussed further below.

**The work of the Scottish Health Technologies Group (SHTG)**

The Scottish Health Technologies Group (SHTG) is part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland. The remit of the SHTG is to provide advice on the evidence on the clinical and cost effectiveness of existing and new technologies likely to have significant implications for patient care in Scotland. This advice should support the planning and decision making processes in NHS boards. This includes a horizon scanning function to provide early intelligence on health technologies in development.

**Barriers to innovation in health and social care**

A critical missing step in the adoption spread of healthcare technology innovations in Scotland is an agreed process to consider evidence based guidance and assessments relating to NMTs including ehealth within NHS boards.

Following consultation with a range of stakeholders across health and social care, it has been established that the current process of considering advice and information on NMTs is not effective and highlighted the significant disparity in the assessment and consideration of guidance relating to medicine versus NMTs.

Based on the findings from the consultation process, the report continues by providing a number of recommendations towards improving the consideration of NMTs; further information, alongside a number of recommendations for improving consideration of NMTs, can be found here:
Another barrier articulated by manufacturers and developers of innovative NMTs was that there was nowhere for them to ‘go’ to get their technology considered for use within the NHS (i.e. in terms of relative clinical and cost effectiveness). In other words, there are limited mechanisms through which buyers and sellers (commissioners and developers) can identify and make contact with each other.

With this in mind, and also to support the Scottish Government’s Statement of Intent for Innovation in Health, the SHTG has introduced the Innovative Medical Technology Overview (IMTO) process. The purpose of the IMTO process is to provide manufacturers/sponsors of non-medicine technologies the opportunity to submit their technology performance, economic, patient, and organisation issues evidence for independent assessment within NHS Scotland, with a view to improving the opportunity for the adoption of their technology across the NHS.

The aim of an IMTO is to provide objective information that will contribute to the local decision-making of NHS health professionals, NHS managers, and procurement colleagues. SHTG intends that the production of IMTOs will remove the requirement for each NHS board within NHS Scotland to carry out their own individual assessments; thereby streamlining the process and lowering the barriers to widespread adoption. The process is responsive and completed in a short time frame, increasing its relevance and utility both for users in NHS Scotland and in industry, especially SMEs. Expert opinion and advice obtained in this way can help innovators catapult good ideas into commercial successes. By encouraging the generation of evidence for NHS users and working in partnership with industry, SHTG offers the possibility of expediting the adoption of new technologies that will generate population health gain as quickly as possible. However, although the IMTO helps to remove one barrier, the key barrier remains; the requirement for a process through which NMTs can be routinely considered.

We very much welcome the focus that the committee is placing on technologies and innovation and I offer the full support of Healthcare Improvement Scotland in this endeavour.

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