

## It's Time to Sack the Silo



Andy Goodman, Avoira's Head of Radio & Critical Communications, explains how by 'sacking the silo' and getting connected, hospital staff can reduce clinical errors, enhance patient care whilst optimising productivity and reducing waste.



I'm not usually one for quoting politicians but I was really struck by the words of the Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, when discussing his plans to modernise the NHS.

To be fair, he said, as politicians do, a lot of words, some of which will no doubt be welcomed by hospital clinicians and administrators, others less so.

But, these particular ones, sitting within Labour's Build an NHS fit for the Future manifesto document, stuck out:

"A system reliant on pagers and fax machines is not fit for this decade let alone the next"

There is, no doubt, an element of exaggeration going on here. Whilst fax machines can still be found beeping away, many trusts have done away with them, if not necessarily by choice. Former health sec Matt Hancock banned their purchase in January 2019 and demanded their withdrawal by the end of March 2020.

He cited much the same reasoning as Mr Streeting, saying that, "Because I love the NHS I want to bring it into the 21st century and use the very best technology available. We've got to get the basics right, like having computers that work and getting rid of the archaic fax machines still used across the NHS when everywhere else got rid of them years ago."

It is perhaps a salutatory lesson in the gap sometimes found between political rhetoric and reality that last year it was reported that 26 NHS trusts still owned fax machines. Moreover, when announcing he was going to axe the fax, Mr Hancock's nod towards a technological revolution was limited to championing email.

However, it now looks like there is greater ambition to harness technology to enhance patient care and drive efficiencies. AI is being touted as a key tool to drive earlier diagnoses, a move, which if successful, will not only deliver much better health outcomes, but relieve pressure on acute services further down the treatment line.

## Sacking 'silos'

What I'm sure many of us agree on is that the NHS needs to be better connected. That means staff no longer working in technological 'silos', operating different, isolated devices depending upon their role and tasks.

Indeed, it's not just an NHS but international healthcare issue, as confirmed by a new trans-continental survey of 500 senior-level hospital leaders within clinical, IT and procurement environments.

The Zebra Global Healthcare Vision Study found that some 55% of clinicians "report that connecting hospital systems for better communication between workers is a top operational challenge."

With some NHS trusts still relying on standard smartphones hosting disparate applications and operating across multiple systems, it's not hard to see why. But it is possible to bring together disparate functions into a unified system to enhance patient care and optimise operational efficiencies.



And when I say disparate, I mean embracing everything from patient identification, through location of equipment and staff, task assignment, medication administration, supply chain management and more.

It's a trend that's in motion. In 2017 the Healthcare Vision Study found that the top choice in hospitals was to allow employees to bring their own devices (BYOD) to work. This was followed by provision of hospital-owned devices and, in third place, provision of hospital-owned devices purpose built for healthcare (my italics).

Such has the shift been that, as clinicians and managers appreciate the benefits of mobile devices explicitly designed for healthcare and the sacking of silos, those positions have now been totally reversed.

## What can technology do for you?

Looking at specific technologies now available to hospital administrators and clinicians is arguably the best way of demonstrating how transformational they can be.

Let's take what is no doubt an everyday irritation for many healthcare staff: finding stuff! Imagine if, when looking for a bed, wheelchair IV pump or heart monitor, you could immediately locate it on a hand-held device.

Embracing a hospital asset tracking solution makes this a relatively simple endeavour. These work through the attachment of RFID sensors and tags to equipment so that their movement can be constantly monitored and their location reported, in real-time, to a hand-held device.

That device is not, of course, an iPhone but a made-for-purpose, multi-functional mobile computer. Take, for example, Zebra Technologies' HC50, a disinfectant ready piece of kit that offers a glove-friendly six inch screen, offers super-fast WiFi 6 connectivity, operates as both a push-to-talk two-way radio and PBX handset and incorporates an integrated barcode scanner.

It can host a patient identification solution so that staff can verify patient identity and information, from admission through diagnosis and treatment and all the way to discharge.

Deployment of barcode medication administration can also help minimise the risk of medication errors. Clinical staff need simply scan a patient's wristband and their medication to confirm a match.

Both patients and staff can also be tracked, again in real-time. The form assists both clinicians and administrators in managing patient throughput and safety whilst the latter removes the need for doctors and nurses to leave the bedside whilst they look for support.

In keeping with the ongoing trajectory of modern healthcare, the HC50 is also telehealth ready, with a 5mp front-facing camera delivering superb quality videoconference.

This very smart piece of technology can also be used as workstation courtesy of Zebra's Workstation Connect software. Creating a desktop experience, it empowers connection to multiple peripherals such as handheld scanners, printers and keyboards.

## Zero heroes

As I mentioned in a previous article (Can Smart Tech Help Community Nursing Teams Overcome Mounting Challenges?), Zebra kit is also extremely eco-conscious.

Having a single rather than multiple devices handling telephony, radio, scanning and computer functions clearly reduces the manufacturing footprint.

That footprint itself is minimised by Zebra's environmentally-friendly manufacturing processes.

This means none of the company's devices contain "forever chemicals" such as potentially carcinogenic perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFO) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and no latex. They're also mercury-free.

Longevity is another factor.

Whilst smartphones appear to have obsolescence built-in to a 36-month cycle, Zebra mobile computers are designed to serve a minimum of three years. They're also supported by up to six-years' repair and technical support and Lifeguard for Android OS and security updates.

These environmentally positive features may not be major in the grand scheme of things, but they nonetheless support NHS trusts' pursuit of challenging Net Zero targets.



## Prescribing solutions

With the government's emphasis on 'reform' rather than significant funding increases, it's incumbent on hospital administrators and executives to squeeze even greater value from the resources they have.

At the same time, as an ageing and growing population places greater pressures upon the NHS, maintaining and enhancing standards of patient care will become a greater challenge.



Embracing purpose-designed hardware and software is clearly seen as part of the solution.

Over half of those surveyed for the 2024 Healthcare Vision study "agreed that technology could help improve medication tracking, patient throughput and nursing workflows."

Some 80% of clinicians and 87% of executives said that "patient care would improve if nurses, clinicians and non-clinical healthcare workers had collaboration tools and healthcare applications."

To give you some idea of the scale and pace of change, in the next year 77% of decision-makers plan to implement enterprise-grade mobile devices and 75% location tags and RFID printers

Around 90% plan to increase their investment in clinical mobility, location and IT solutions, with over a third looking at an uplift of 10% or more.

So, whilst new technology may not offer a cure to all the NHS's current and coming challenges, it is nonetheless recognised as a very useful prescription.

If you want to get going, to do more and do it better, let's talk!

**Book a free consultation**

📞 0333 001 5151

✉️ [info@avoira.com](mailto:info@avoira.com)

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