

eHealth

priorities and strategies
in European countries



Fact sheet

England

March 2007

Towards the Establishment
of a European eHealth
Research Area

 eHealth

eHEALTH  ERA



United Kingdom

Health services in the United Kingdom

Each of the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) has its own, separately administered health service. All are publicly funded and branded as the “National Health Service” (NHS) offering broadly the same range of services – it is essentially the administrative arrangements that are different. The four health services operate independently, but there is close cooperation and collaboration to ensure that all citizens receive the same quality of care.

The NHS in England is the responsibility of the Department of Health. NHS Connecting for Health is an integral agency of the Department of Health that is responsible for delivering the National Programme for IT for the NHS in England. The Department of Health is also part of the UK Government and is responsible for representing the UK internationally in health matters, liaising with the other “home countries” as appropriate.

The NHS in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Welsh Assembly is a devolved administration that draws its authority from the UK Parliament and has responsibility for a number of issues, including among others health. “Informing Healthcare Wales” is the National Programme for NHS Wales to develop new methods, tools and information technologies to transform health services for the people of Wales.

The NHS in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. Scotland has its own Parliament and Executive again formally drawing its powers from the UK Parliament, and with devolved responsibility for health and other matters. Scotland has its own eHealth strategy administered by the Scottish Executive Health Department.



The NHS in Northern Ireland is a little different from the other UK health services in that it has a combined health and social care administration. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive are currently suspended, but Northern Ireland retains its own distinct administration under the Northern Ireland Office of the UK Government. Health and social care in Northern Ireland comes under the Northern Ireland Government Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with its own eHealth strategy.

England

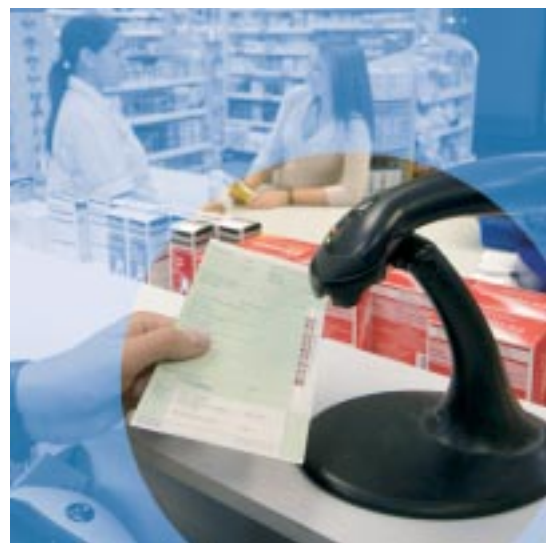
Strategic perspective

The UK Department of Health is responsible for the overall eHealth policy of England. Regionally based Strategic Health Authorities are responsible for coordinating and performance managing the progress of local National Health Service (NHS) bodies. Each of the other devolved administrations of the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), has their own equivalent bodies.

NHS Connecting for Health is the agency of the UK Department of Health responsible for delivering the National Programme for IT (NPFIT) in England. The NPFIT, launched in 2002, is one of the largest public sector health IT projects in the world and aims to provide authorised access to patient information whenever and wherever it is needed. Its stated objective is to implement an "integrated IT infrastructure and systems for all NHS organisations in England by 2010", which enables patients to make informed health choices and which increases the efficiency and effectiveness of clinicians and other NHS staff. NPFIT aims to achieve these goals by:

- creating a NHS Care Records Service (NHS CRS) to improve the sharing of consenting patients' records across the NHS and also provide patient access to their own health records,
- making it easier and faster for general practitioners (GPs) and other primary care staff to book hospital appointments for patients,
- providing a system for electronic transmission of prescriptions,
- ensuring the NHS IT infrastructure can meet its current and future needs for broadband connections and network services.

Legal regulations exist in the area of data protection (1998), telecommunications (in regard to data protection and confidentiality, 2003) and digital signatures (2005). The Information Commissioner's Office has the overseeing authority in this regard.



Implementation perspective

Major infrastructure elements of the Programme are in place; as well as the national systems, over 12,000 local systems are in place serving well over 250,000 NHS staff. While eHealth infrastructure is provided by the NPFIT, the delivery of benefits depends on the ability to integrate local NHS systems with the NPFIT infrastructure. Online dissemination activities take place through the websites of the Department of Health and NHS Connecting for Health, and through promotion in person at public conferences. The Programme has also featured frequently in the press.

Some of the main achievements to date include:

- Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions (now the Electronic Prescription Service - EPS) was delivered by the end of December 2004 as an enhancement to the NHS Care Record Spine. After integration testing, live operations commenced on 11 February 2005 with the first compliant GP and pharmacy systems. To date over 6.5 million electronic prescriptions have been issued (out of a total of some 370 million prescriptions issued per year).



- More than 1.3 million hospital appointments have now been booked electronically at a rate of 10,000 a day and rising accounting for over 20% of NHS referrals for treatment.
- The Picture Archiving and Communication Systems (PACS) went live in 2005 with the first images being transferred through the network in March of that year. 56 new Picture Archiving and Communications Systems (PACS) systems are now live and more than 80 million digital images have been stored, benefitting over 3 million patients per year.
- Implementation of the New National Network (N3) began in April 2004. When complete the NHS network will be one of the largest Virtual Private Networks (VPN) in the world. More than 15,000 NHS locations are connected already. All NHS sites are planned to be connected by March 2007.

Success has been measured by NHS Connecting for Health deployment statistics, which show as of 6 November 2006:

- 287,713 users registered for access to the Spine
- 6,554,406 prescriptions transmitted using the EPS
- 1,607,267 Choose and Book bookings
- 83,858,413 images stored using PACS
- 15,894 National Network (N3) connections
- 210,777 registered NHSmail users

The initial components that went live in July 2004 included:

- the Personal Demographic Service (PDS) containing identity details of over 48 million patients,
- the Messaging Service (TMS) handling 220 million messages on an annualised basis,
- access controls to ensure that only authorised access points and authorised personnel can connect to the live services,
- the Choose and Book facility to allow GP Practices to book appointments for their patients at particular hospitals.

Future activities

Healthcare reform is high on the policy agenda, and eHealth activities are recognised as a key necessary component. However, the goal to provide an integrated IT infrastructure and systems for all NHS organisations in England by 2010 continues to present significant challenges. The National Programme for IT is a large, complex programme within the NHS, one of the world's largest organisations, itself undergoing radical change to deliver better healthcare for people. A key challenge is to introduce modern information technology and the business changes necessary to exploit it fully without impacting the safe delivery of care. The Programme has set ambitious and challenging targets to deliver systems to provide defined benefits and believes it is better that there should be delay to implementation of a system to get it right for patients and clinicians, rather than to deploy it rapidly and get it wrong. Significant focus is also being placed on ensuring that the NHS organisations can and do play a full part in implementing the programme system and can make the best use of the programme's systems to improve services.

Extensive information about the National Programme's implementation plans are available online at <http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/implementation>.

Core resources

Department of Health

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/InformationPolicy/fs/en>

NHS Connecting For Health

<http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk>

About eHealth ERA

This fact sheet is the outcome of research in the context of the *eHealth ERA* project (Towards the Establishment of a European Research Area). The project is implemented by empirica GmbH (co-ordinating partner, Germany), STAKES (Finland), CITTRU (Poland), ISC III (Spain), CNR (Italy) and EPSRC (United Kingdom), based on a Coordination Action contract with the European Commission.

The European Commission, Directorate General Information Society and Media, supports this project to contribute towards greater transparency across Member States and other participating countries on eHealth strategies as well as innovation-oriented research and technology development (RTD) initiatives, including the coordination of Member States' eHealth strategy formulation and implementation.

The fact sheet is an excerpt from the report "eHealth priorities and strategies in European countries", published by the European Commission in April 2007. The complete report is available for download at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=3346.

Acknowledgements

The eHealth ERA team owes a great debt to all the national representatives and their national experts who contributed to and reviewed the fact sheets. Possible inaccuracies of information are at the responsibility of the project team. This fact sheet reflects solely the views of its authors. The status of activities described is generally August 2006.

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Contact

For further information about this fact sheet or the eHealth ERA project, please contact:



eHealth ERA

c/o empirica GmbH
Oxfordstr. 2, 53111 Bonn, Germany
Fax: (49-228) 98530-12
eMail: info at ehealth-era dot org
<http://www.ehealth-era.org>



Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council
Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon, SN2 1ET
UK