Bring health care into the 21 century

February 27, 2012 By iStayHealthy

I do love the British NHS. Really. The public health service has been in operation for about 6 decades. When it does things well, it does it really well. But the other side is a bureaucracy stuck in neutral and with processes that don't seem to have moved on much since the 1940s.
Take the clinics I go to for example. For my HIV condition I go to a Sexual Health clinic. You may be forgiven to think you're entering a private clinic. Good service, competent staff. And a keen eye on modernising/improving the service. The clinic was the first to introduce an Option E plan for patients who are in a stable condition/HIV status. With your consent they would email your result explaining the individual blood values and what they mean for you. Per default they text appointment reminders to your mobile.
It's the same clinic that I currently work with to load blood/test results directly into iStayHealthy.

At the other end of the spectrum I'd like to mention the other clinic I go to. Apart from HIV I also have a heart condition with my 2nd heart valve replacement 4 years ago. The service is stuck in the mud. Most of the records are still paper based. And whoever thinks this is much better than electronic records, let me tell you that a significant number of paper based reports get misplaced and lost. Like mine recently. Then there is no consistent booking system, which means that sometimes you end up with overlapping appointments for different tests.

I am a firm believer in the benefits of public health care. But health care comes at a price. To provide the best service to everybody costs money. But often the solution is not to throw more money at the problem, but to reassess how the service can change. In my cardiac clinic, health workers are regularly overworked and stressed. Largely due to bad organisation - and increasingly due to lack of employing modern technologies that help not only patients but also health professionals.

For sure, technology is not the answer to all our woes. But it is an important part of the answer. Expectations on health services have risen and will continue to rise. At the same time health services are under immense pressure from politicians and society to keep within increasingly constrained budgets. Deliver more with less. Often with far less.

Already we have seen a number of disruptive technologies moving into this space. In the UK the Department of Health recently encouraged app developers to submit ideas and software to help patients - and to be 'prescribed' by patients. Mobile technology is also moving more into hospitals and clinics to help with the daily workflow of health care professionals. We may not expect the proverbial 'silver bullet' from emerging technologies. But at least they can help to keep the health services effective and affordable.

Bringing change is always difficult. The UK government sponsored a multi-billion programme in the early part of the 2000 - 2010. The National Programme for IT. It's purpose was to move the health service to

an electronic based system. In 2010, the government finally conceded defeat. One of the reports mentioned deep rooted resistance in the health service towards modern technologies, changes of workflows and processes.

But change is happening. And we see it all over the globe. And one day I hope to see it even in my cardiac clinic.

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