DAVID SIM

Here, David Sim, the Innovation Director of Moray based business openbrolly health, talks about how we can make the most of the growing information.

If you want to see the practical benefits of the relationship between data and technology, there are few better illustrations than in the healthcare field. Data is changing lives; it's the corner stone of the devices which help patients manage long term health conditions, and the go-to option for the health conscious who want to monitor fitness.

"The healthcare data revolution is well documented. Patients are arriving at GP offices with graphically analysed data about their blood sugar levels or sleep patterns. The #datasaveslives campaign is demonstrating the value of data research in public health.

The overriding objective we have is to bridge the gap between data and information, and between consumers, public services and the third sector. In our "MyCancerPortal" product we're creating a national service where people living with cancer can describe their symptoms and their concerns and receive value back. This can be anything from a better informed conversation with a clinician through to information about access to financial support.

This year, colorectal and prostate cancer patients across the north of Scotland will be able to access this service, thanks to the forward thinking NHS Highland research and development team. Here we need to bridge the data gap - taking a deluge of information and distilling it into a usable form for busy NHS clinicians.

Consumers are driving this revolution more than the care providers. Major corporates are turning to personal healthcare as a new marketplace. We have a vision where the data collected by devices like Fitbits, Apple Watches and food tracking apps can form part of the health and social care ecosystem, collected with patient's permission to improve care and research. We're working with Robert Gordon University to develop our understanding of how that can work and be useful in a clinical environment.

The key here is making use of the data - not just collecting it. There's a huge opportunity for SMEs to use healthcare data to transform people's understanding of their own, or their family's, or others' wellbeing. If you're starting there is no doubt there is interest and need.

There are challenges around delivery, however.

This depends on new innovative business models coming alongside it - the NHS does not have a bottomless pit of money to buy gadgets or apps or reporting tools. Similarly, its clinicians don't have limitless time to test ideas, change processes or co-design solutions, so it's necessary to look elsewhere for the resources so that any solution entering public healthcare (anywhere in the world) can hit the ground running and create benefits from day one.

There is a need for more data and device-driven solutions that provide a holistic wellbeing solution that cuts across public healthcare, the third sector, voluntary organisations and the support structures including charities and faith groups. There are opportunities beyond the UK to transform the delivery of public health through better use of interpreted data to directly provide new services. The proliferation of lower-cost, data-crunching resources in itself opens up new opportunities. We need to be prepared to make use of the services and facilities that already exist and to partner with others in the Highlands and beyond to develop an effective service, not just a software product.

Data will save many lives, all over the world; the need is there, but resources are limited. Tomorrow's solutions will be delivered in new ways using new data - that's the exciting challenge."

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