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Is More Technology Always Healthy?

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We live in a world experiencing faster technological development than at any other time in human history.

Every year new developments are made which are pushing forward the boundaries of human endeavour. And yet, we rarely stop to ask one, obvious, big question: What, actually, is *the point* of all this shiny new tech? Do the things we're implementing make our lives easier, our businesses more efficient, our products and services better?

Nowhere is the Big Question more vital than in healthcare.

Health Technology is a perfect litmus test for every other sector. Healthcare cannot do without technology and cannot deliver better results without advancing technology. The twist however, is that much of what goes on is life-critical, so tech used must work nigh perfectly pre-implementation.

But more than this unlike any other sector healthcare is the great unifier. As is often the case this is best shown in fiction.

In James White's series '*Sector General*' one statement is made throughout, that healing and care bring us together like nothing else. White's work is built around the idea that there is no clearer expression of collaboration, goodwill and friendship than saving a life.

For a system based on these basic principles it is shocking how little of the technology in healthcare is connected, how little collaboration there is in health tech.

Recently, I spent a few days in hospital and, at first, marvelled at how my vital signs were being monitored, how high-tech our hospitals have become.

But, soon, something began to niggle at me. For all this technology, not one bit of it seemed connected to any other. I saw doctors log into machines, which were monitoring patient's vital signs, only to write down the readings. In effect, simply replicating work.

During my hospital stay I was moved from one hospital to another, only to receive the same set of tests again. Not because of any incompetence by hospital staff, who were all brilliant. It was because not one of the machines or systems in place was integrated into any other, either within hospitals or across the healthcare system. From one hospital to another or one department to another no one could quickly and easily access data stored elsewhere.

This type of situation is replicated across diverse sectors. Generally the way things are still done is to take a piecemeal approach to the application of new technology. We identify a problem and then create a piece of technology to solve it.

While superficially this seems like the best course of action, all too often new technology is put in place without thinking about how it fits into the wider ecosystem or if a new piece of tech actually is the right solution.

So how do we solve this? I believe the answer does not lie in more training, or more hours by staff. It doesn't require any new hiring by healthcare providers. Instead it requires a shift in how we approach technology. Large organisations, like the NHS, need to be taking a top-down perspective.

I know that, especially for the healthcare sector, calling for another top-down reorganisation of *anything* is going to be as welcome as a rabid dog at a senior person's tea-party, and is going to get people worried...but hear me out.

Technology exists to make our lives easier, our work more efficient and our results better. So start from this basis. Take a top-level view of health tech provision. Let's start with why we are doing changes? What is it we believe will make our lives better? What do people working in healthcare actually need from technology? How can the application of new technology improve outcomes? Is new technology the best solution to a given problem?

There is no point having the latest in monitoring or diagnostic technology if all it achieves is forcing doctors to repeat tasks. In many cases better application, through an integrated technological ecosystem, can provide better results than a new bit of technology.

While new technological developments can help, right now, today, getting what we already have connected up is what will deliver better results.

We are all going to have need of healthcare. Whether it's a happy occasion such as a birth of your child or for routine check ups or for when things go wrong. An integrated and connected technological system across healthcare can drive better results and reduce the time doctors and nurses spend on everything but treatment.

Everyone wants that silver bullet which will solve their problems. However, the healthier choice is often in front of us. We just have to choose it.

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