Topol: NHS has no time to waste

With healthcare technologies (including genomics) expected to have a significant impact on patient care over the next two decades, the NHS must now focus on building a digitally-ready workforce to use these new technologies and maximise their benefits, says The Topol Review, a new **report by Eric Topol**, MD, Executive VP and Professor, Molecular Medicine, The Scripps Research Institute.

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Technologies have remarkable potential to improve accuracy of diagnoses and treatments, the efficiency of care, and workflow for healthcare professionals. Wider adoption of new healthcare tech, according to the Topol report, will necessitate extensive education and training of the clinician workforce, as well as the patients, who are likely to take greater charge of their care using digital tools. In addition to genomics, which will lead to a wider range of personalised treatments, other technologies such as digital medicine, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics should not just be seen as increasing costs, but rather as a new means of addressing the "big healthcare challenges" of the 21st century, according to the NHS study.

"From late 2017 to the present, our cross-disciplinary team of experts, including clinicians, educators, ethicists, computer scientists, engineers and economists, reviewed the available data and projected into the future what impact these technologies would have on the NHS workforce over the next two decades," said Topol.

The report, proposes three principles to support the deployment of **digital healthcare technologies** throughout the NHS:

- **Patients** need to be included as partners and informed about health technologies, with a particular focus on vulnerable/marginalised groups to ensure equitable access.
- The healthcare workforce needs expertise and guidance to evaluate new technologies, using processes grounded in **real-world evidence**.
- The gift of time: wherever possible the adoption of new technologies should enable staff to gain more time to care, promoting deeper interaction with patients.

"Motivation, a willingness to learn new behaviours, developing skills in collaboration and sharing knowledge are essential for NHS staff to be able to harness advances in technologies," the report notes. To achieve transformational change, it is important for educators and organisations within the NHS to cultivate a cross-disciplinary approach that includes data scientists, computer scientists, engineers, bioinformaticians, in addition to the traditional mix of pharmacists, nurses and doctors.

The report says early, effective and sustained staff engagement at all levels, especially **front-line staff**, is crucial for technology-enabled transformational change to be successful. "The greatest challenge is the culture shift in learning and innovation, with a willingness to embrace technology for system-wide improvement," the NHS report points out. "Recognising that there will be a five-to-seven year time lag to full adoption, there is now a window of opportunity in which to strengthen the infrastructure, upskill the workforce and catalyse the transformation. There is no time to waste."

Source: The Topol Review: Preparing the healthcare workforce to deliver the digital future , NHS
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