

Indextra  
Whitepaper

# Digital health: Friend or foe for doctors?



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Digital health is a new space that spans from communication via apps and social media, to wearable technology & medical devices. As the demand for high quality healthcare rises and technology progresses, patients are increasingly turning to digital tools to manage their own health. Healthcare professionals are also increasingly searching for new health technology to offer them effective solutions to manage their time more efficiently.

In this white paper, we will review the rise of digital health tools and assess the impact this has on the healthcare professional task force in the UK.

# The UK healthcare system is feeling the strain



The UK's National Health Service has been saluted for its cost-effective method of providing universal healthcare. However, doctors are working in a system that is under ever-increasing pressure.

GPs are dealing with up to 100 patients a day amid growing shortages of doctors<sup>1</sup>, and now around one in four UK patients are waiting at least a week to see their GP<sup>2</sup>.

Rising costs of healthcare, an ageing population and inaccessibility to timely care is causing huge problems for the healthcare industry, and is prompting a rise in wait times. Not surprising then that patients are also waiting on average 2 weeks to see a doctor<sup>3</sup>

and there are around 4.3 million patients waiting for an operation in the UK – the highest number in a decade<sup>4</sup>.

This strain is contributed to by budget pressures, population growth and increased life expectancy, and means that the NHS is facing a £30 billion funding gap by 2021<sup>5</sup>. Figures have shown that a rise in demand, due to long-term health conditions, is expected to require an additional £5 billion alone<sup>5</sup>.

So where does digital health come into this?

# Digital health, an added pressure for UK doctors?

It is clear that now more than ever, patients are using digital tools to manage their own health. Whether that be diet management, monitoring activity levels or simply being able to book GP appointments or repeat prescriptions with the touch of a button – patients want to be able to access care when, where and how they need it. The appeal of being able to take healthcare into their own hands is one of the reasons why the UK mobile health market is now worth around £250 million.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, 83% of doctors report they are regularly seeing patients who have already self-diagnosed using online sources.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore perhaps understandable that doctors feel under increased pressure to be even more knowledgeable. This trend is coupled with the fact that appointment-waiting times are now at a 10-year high, which is leading to over three-quarters (76%) of doctors feeling pressured to diagnose patients quickly.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, nearly 9 in 10 (88%) doctors surveyed say that they would themselves turn to online resources like Google or Wikipedia for a second opinion.<sup>7</sup>

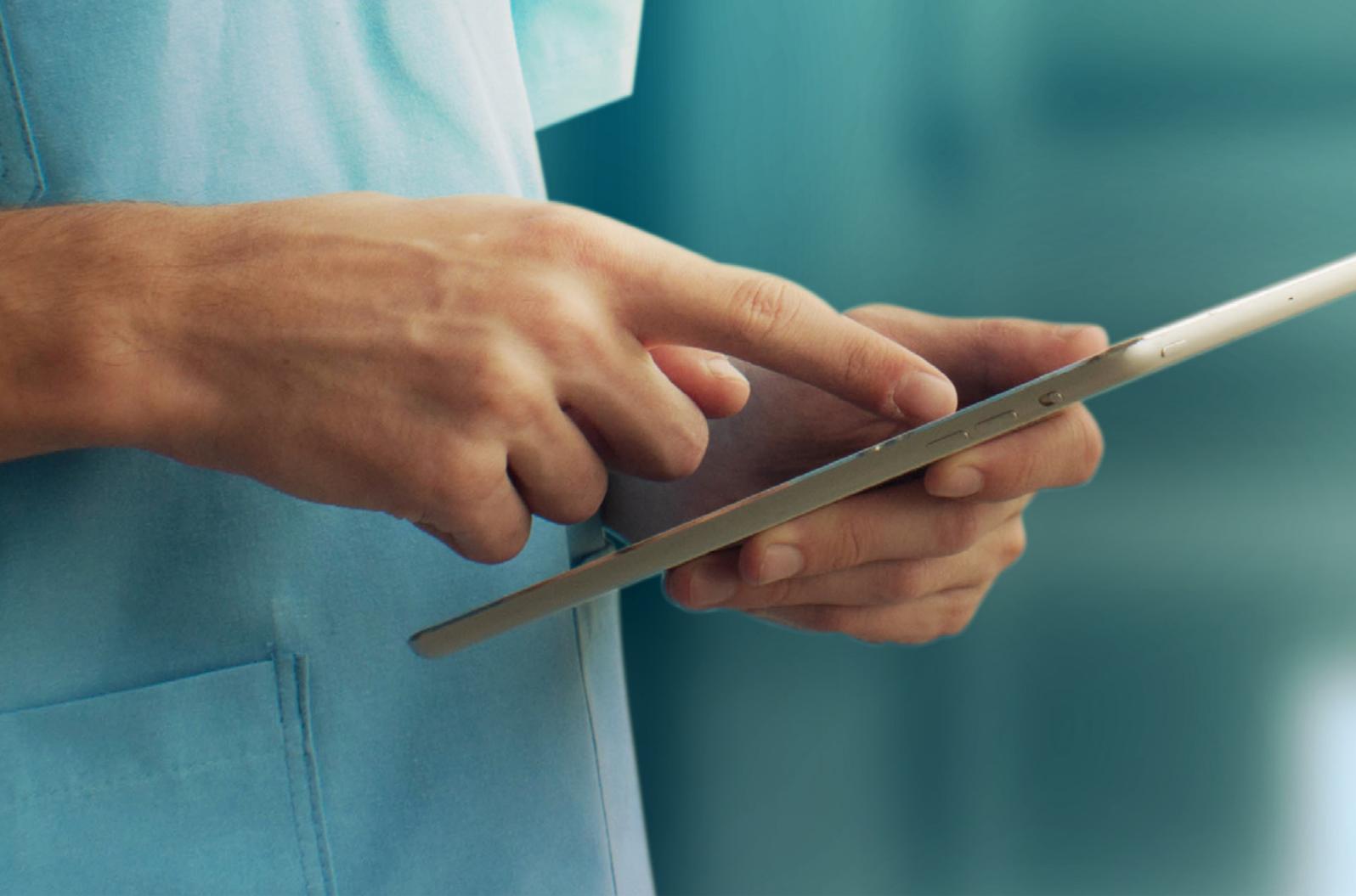
However, of those searching online, 92% are concerned with the objectivity of their search results.<sup>7</sup>

Doctors say they seek a second opinion online because they feel certain physical resources that they have at their disposal (e.g. hardcopy textbooks and medical journals) are out of date (85%)<sup>7</sup>, or because using online resources is quicker (83%).<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on the future of healthcare, Magnus Olofsson, product manager at Indextra said: “To keep up with demand, the resource-stretched healthcare system must leverage new technology and invest in solutions that support innovation, operational efficiencies, and diagnosis and treatment accuracy.”

85% of doctors say that digital developments will play a key role in improving the diagnosis, treatment and management of patients in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Research carried out by Indextra explored the attitudes of doctors to digital health. Results revealed that over four-fifths (85%) of doctors say that digital developments will play a key role in improving the diagnosis,



treatment and management of patients in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, 83% think there needs to be better integration of digital tools and resources to support improved diagnosis, treatment and management of patients<sup>7</sup> and 84% think they need to embrace digital tools in the same way their patients do.<sup>7</sup>

# Digital health policy in the UK

The UK Government recently committed to increasing the health system's budget by £20 billion annually by 2023. Separately, the Government has refreshed their digital health strategy and launched NHS Digital, which will be supported by a £4.2 billion government investment over the next five years. As part of this programme, the NHS is building on their existing services to help patients interact online with their GP, providing online consultations and tools to manage appointments and prescriptions. New online tools for urgent and emergency departments will also be rolled out to help doctors' quickly direct people to the right care they need. It is hoped that this funding will go some way to support an already over-stretched NHS.

From a recent October 2018 policy paper from the Department Of Health And Social Care it is clear that, digital health is incredibly important to the future of healthcare. However, according to the paper, the NHS is 'far behind where it needs to be',<sup>8</sup> and if the health system in the UK is to leverage such groundbreaking techniques such as personalized medicine, much work needs to be done.

However, there are already plenty of examples that show how digital health is supporting the healthcare system in the UK. From apps that help patients and their doctors to have two-way dialogue remotely to monitor



and manage their diabetes and treatment, to apps that help patients manage their chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; providing doctors the opportunity to better predict the severity and course of their patient's COPD.

In addition, widespread adoption of artificial intelligence and the NHS embracing "full automation" of AI, could free up as much as £12.5 billion a year worth of staff time for them to spend interacting with patients. Machines could ease the burden of a wide range of tasks currently done by doctors, nurses, healthcare assistants and administrative staff.

# What is the solution?

The real tension point between healthcare professionals and patients is the patient interest in the 'quantified self', for example, self-diagnosis via googling or wearable technology.

Compounded with the use of online resources by healthcare professionals, we see a huge need for accessible, up to date and correct information to allow doctors to treat their patients.

Digital healthcare tools have the potential to be not only a doctors' friend, but also their ally. If credible, trusted tools are embraced, in the same way that they are by patients, they

can help optimize doctors' time, accuracy of diagnosis and treatment, often in partnership with the very patients they are working to support.

- Over four-fifths (84%) of doctors agree that digital developments will help support the efficient provision of healthcare.<sup>7</sup>
- 83% of doctors say more digital tools are required to support optimal patient care.<sup>7</sup>
- 79% agreed that the greater availability of digital tools would help free up doctor's time and resources for those patients who require urgent care.<sup>7</sup>

- 84% of doctors agree they must embrace digital tools in the same way their patients do.<sup>7</sup>
- 80% of doctors agree that the potential of digital tools is far from being recognised in healthcare.<sup>7</sup>
- 83% of doctors agree that better integration of digital tools and resources is needed to support improved diagnosis, treatment and management of patients.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Patients being put at risk as GPs try to squeeze in 100 cases per day ([link](#)).

<sup>2</sup> One in four patients wait a week to see GP amid record A&E pressures ([link](#)).

<sup>3</sup> Average GP waiting times remain at two weeks despite rescue measure, June 2017, last accessed December 2018 ([link](#)).

<sup>4</sup> NHS operation waiting lists reach 10-year high at 4.3m patients, July 2018, last accessed December 2018 ([link](#)).

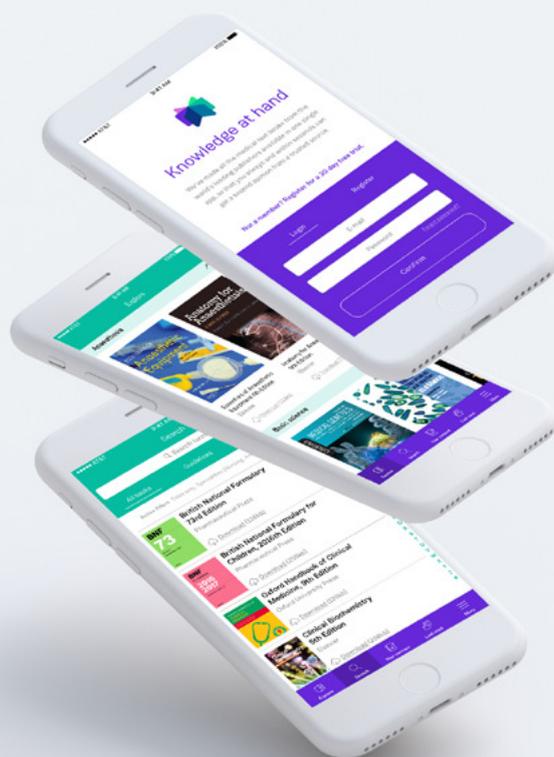
<sup>5</sup> Connected health: How Digital Technology is transforming health and social care, Deloitte Centre, 2015, last accessed December 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Size of the United Kingdom's mHealth application market from 2014 to 2018 ([link](#)).

<sup>7</sup> Indextra research, conducted by Censuswide, June 2018.

<sup>8</sup> The future of healthcare: our vision for digital, data and technology in health and care, 2018, last accessed December 2018 ([link](#)).

For a free 30-day trial of the Indextra app, visit the sign up page at [indextra.com/signup](http://indextra.com/signup).



Indextra is a medical resource library app that includes over 500 resources from textbooks to drug- guides and clinical guidelines.

Indextra packs essential medical resources into one easy to use app, helping to optimise doctors' time by providing them credible and validated information they need close at hand.

The app is available both online and offline, so medical professionals have access to all resources wherever they are.

The app is available for iPhone, Android and on desktop.



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