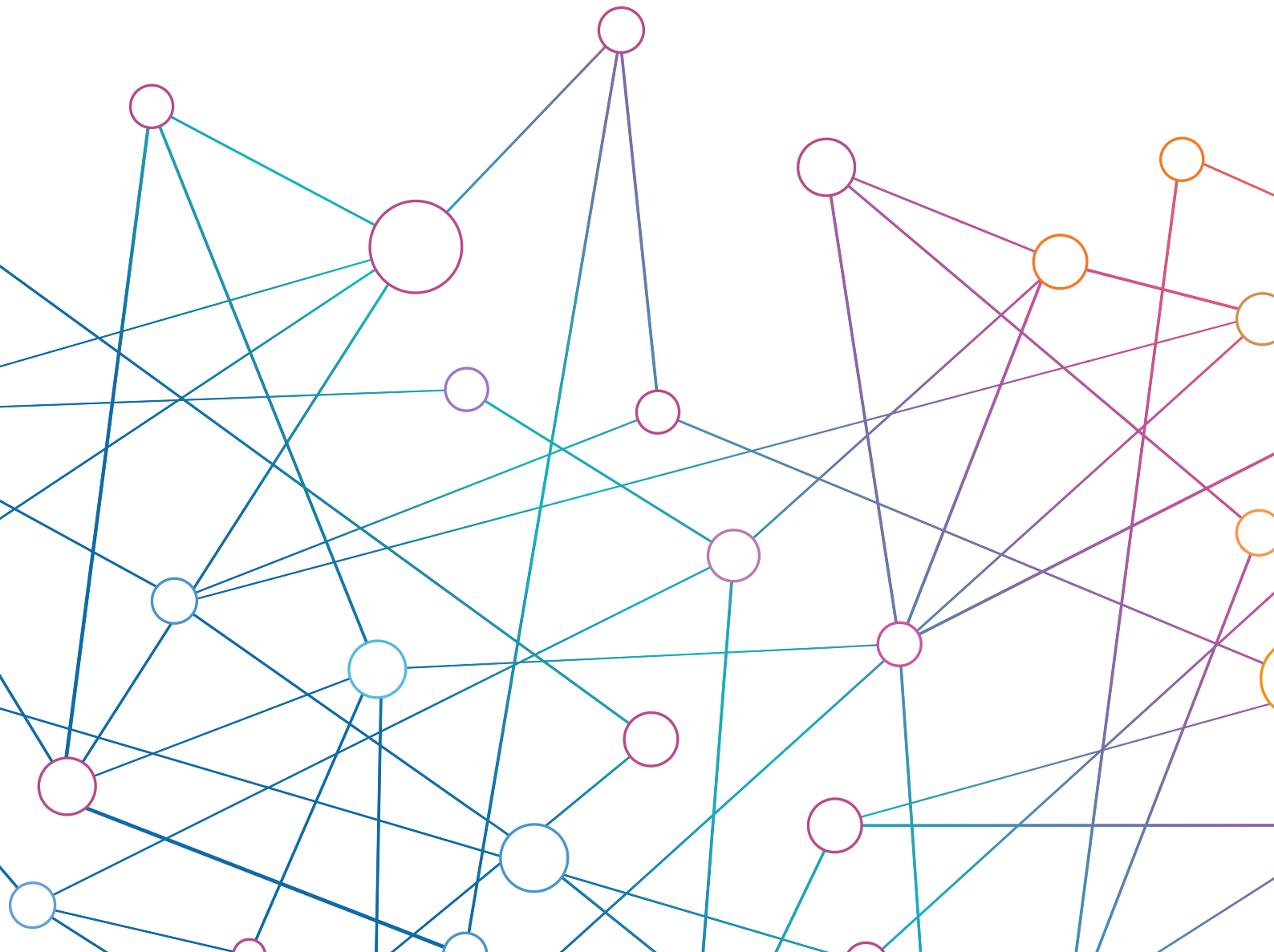


# FUTURE FIT?

**Overcoming challenges to  
healthcare with a digital-first practice**

**brother**  
at your side

**Practice  
Business**



# FUTURE FIT?

## Overcoming challenges to healthcare with a digital-first practice

### CONTENTS

#### 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### 6. KEY FINDINGS

#### 7. INTRODUCTION

#### 9. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

#### 12. FINDINGS

Assessing the general practice perspective (Pg 12)

The perceived need for technology (Pg 13)

Future investments (Pg 16)

#### 17. FURTHER DISCUSSION

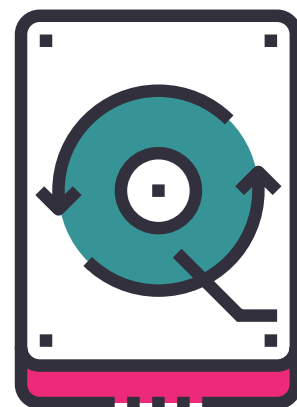
Tech-led solutions (Pg 17)

Comment (Pg 21)

#### 23. CONCLUSION

#### 24. REFERENCES

#### 24. ABOUT THE AUTHORS



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

General practice is faced with a very real challenge: delivering healthcare to a growing – and ageing – population with more complex needs and higher expectations, coupled with a finite pool of resources. The weight of this challenge is being felt right across the NHS; those working in the sector consistently report their fears that workload pressures are becoming unmanageable and administrative tasks are taking over.

To overcome these challenges, new models of care and modes of operation are being developed. NHS service providers are increasingly looking to technology to support these new models and, at GP practice level, technology is gaining traction as a possible way to streamline the delivery of healthcare. This is backed and promoted by government – as illustrated by recent investment, and health secretary Matt Hancock's own 'tech-vision' for the NHS, which he outlined in autumn 2018.

There is much discussion of what the key 'pinch points' actually are – with many opinions as to what is needed to move forward along the digital pathway - but what are the actual issues, based on evidence?

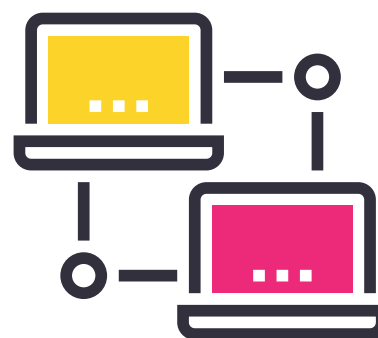
In conjunction with our partner, business technology solutions' provider Brother UK, *Practice Business* set out to identify what the real barriers to change in general practice are because, if the sector can understand these, it can find solutions to overcome them.

We surveyed 135 of our practice manager, and other healthcare practitioner readers, and supported our survey findings with a number of in-depth interviews and a review and analysis of existing literature. In this white paper we use what we learned to identify the obstacles faced by GP practices, investigate the IT solutions being developed in response and explore the need for investment in technology and infrastructure at practice level.

## How did we get here?

Patient demand is increasing. In 2016, The King's Fund published *Understanding pressures in general practice* in which the authors reported that GPs were dealing with a rising workload, that this workload was becoming increasingly complex and intense and, at the same time, that funding was not growing in line with demand.

These factors are being exacerbated by a shortage of NHS GPs – in part the result of fewer practitioners undertaking full-time clinical work, but also due to large numbers retiring or leaving the profession altogether. While visions for a paperless NHS have proved premature, there remains a strong case for document management; digitising patient records, for example, is one way that healthcare practitioners see efficiencies being made.



The King's Fund report, *Digital change in health and social care* (2018), notes that technology can improve quality, efficiency and patient experience in healthcare, as well as supporting more integrated care to the benefit of the health of a population. In fact, most research will back the potential that technology has to enhance and support healthcare services. However, it must be acknowledged that barriers to digital transformation exist.

The challenge now is to identify how to effectively implement technology solutions to overcome these barriers.

### **A demanding situation**

This study found that patient demand is, unsurprisingly, one of the key challenges general practice faces, and that this is having a predictable effect in terms of workload pressures; it is also a key driver in the adoption of technology. Our research makes clear that technology is widely viewed as a means of alleviating practice pressures – realising operational efficiency, improving patient access to healthcare and enhancing the overall patient experience. Furthermore, while there remain some uncertainties about technology and its adoption in general practice, GPs and their teams are digitally innovating – albeit cautiously.

An already stretched primary care sector will certainly require tangible support if it is to be able to take some of the strain from the hospital sector. The government's Digital Transformation Programme (DTP) is intended to provide this support; it aims to remove a massive workload burden from GPs and, in turn, front-of-house practice staff.

### **Digital changes behind the scenes**

Things are changing digitally behind the scenes. Since January 1, 2018, there has been a requirement that practices are wifi-enabled throughout and, in addition to administrative areas, nearly every consulting room will now have a printer. This additional capacity means that managed print services (MPS) are already delivering tangible benefits for GP practices across the country.

Indeed, managed print services, scan technology and other efficiency-focused solutions have emerged as 'must haves' in a sector seeking to streamline processes, print smarter, realise efficiencies and improve patient experience. According to industry research, MPS, for example, can lower print-related operating and IT costs by as much as 30%.

Online document workflow and capture solutions are becoming increasingly important in streamlining GP practice admin processes.

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**"According to industry research, managed print services can lower print-related operating and IT costs by as much as 30%"**

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The scanning of paper documents, which can then be more easily managed and shared, is also a growing trend. Modern scanners allow users to create searchable PDFs in seconds which can be archived and retrieved much more quickly than paper documents. Security is an additional benefit that comes with this move to digitisation.

### Fit for the future?

Respondents in our survey identified technology that is not fit-for-purpose as a key contributor to increasing workloads. Digital change in health and social care argues that this is a facet of implementation, and questions whether the right checks are in place to ensure the IT across the NHS actually works. This is very important at the individual practice level, and established providers understand this.

Practice managers certainly need to ensure that the technology they are operating is fit-for-purpose and will 'speak' to other devices within the practice and beyond.

Ensuring a sustainable future for the NHS is about future-proofing; only in this way can technology purchases be truly cost-effective. In relation to printer procurement, wifi enables printing via the cloud - and cloud solutions will be essential to practices seeking to adopt the technologies that will pave the way for new efficiencies.

### A digital shift

The responses to this survey clearly show that paper and printing remain central to practice processes; GP practices will need to employ the most effective and efficient strategies possible in order to streamline paper handling and processing; the right tech solutions can certainly help with this. Understanding what and how a practice is printing, having printing hardware positioned in the optimum location(s) and maintaining control and visibility of print and print costs can all deliver savings in terms of both money and time.

There has been a shift towards digital in the healthcare sector - one that is reflective of a wider digital shift in society as a whole. The NHS is rising to patient demands - the number and complexity of their needs, as well as their increasing expectations; technology is central to meeting these aspirations.

This joint study provides sound evidence of a willingness among practice staff to embrace new technologies which work and are proven to make their lives, and those of their patients, easier. Brother UK believes that managed services for new hardware and existing solutions are the way forward.



# KEY FINDINGS



Brother UK and *Practice Business* have, in partnership, investigated the barriers to the effective implementation of technology in general practice. We surveyed 135 of our practice manager and other healthcare practitioner readers, and supported our survey findings with a number of in-depth interviews and a review and analysis of existing literature. Here are the key messages from what our readers told us in the survey.

## What are the greatest challenges faced by GP practices?

- patient demand (87.72%)
- administrative burden (66.67%)
- recruitment and retention issues (61.40%)

## Why are workloads growing?

- increasing demand on healthcare services (94.2%)
- technology, especially hardware, which is not fit-for-purpose (47.46%)
- ineffective technology - 59.32% said their tech was only 'somewhat effective'
- data protection and GDPR compliance (42.37%)

## What's driving the perceived need for tech?

- demand by patients for greater convenience and online access to services (76.27%)
- the push for NHS-wide digital transformation (69.49%)
- requirement for administrative efficiencies and streamlined processes (67.80%)
- new, digital-first systems (66.10%)
- the desire to successfully implement new models of connected care (66.10%)

## Identifying the barriers

- funding (86.44%)
- human resources (61.02%)
- lack of knowledge about new technology (57.63%)
- a lack of interoperability (47.46%)

## What are the greatest tech benefits?

### For practices:

- increased efficiencies (81.36%)
- reduced administrative workload (79.66%)
- time saved (74.58%)
- improved patient experience (66.10%)

### For patients:

- services more convenient or efficient (86.44%)
- provision of more connected care (76.27%)
- better access to care (69.49%)
- better health outcomes (44.07%)

## What areas need to be considered more carefully in the face of NHS digital transformation?

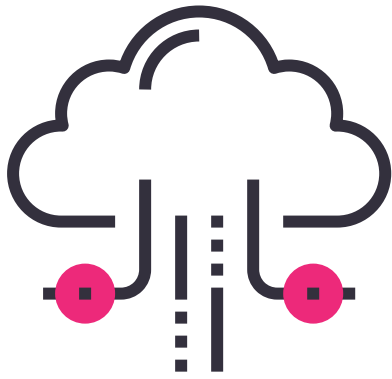
- identified administrative processes (74.58%)
  - use of paper: 20-to-50% of documentation is paper - (49.15%)
  - time devoted to admin: 6 hours or more - (37.29%)
  - time devoted to admin: more than four hours, but fewer than six hours - (27.12%)
- connected systems (71.19%)
- data protection and GDPR compliance (66.10%)
- digitising your paper records (52.54%)

## How can admin be reduced and productivity be improved?

- additional human resources (62.71%)
- better software which connects multiple touch points (59.32%)
- upgraded technology (hardware) which is more efficient and fit-for-purpose (55.93%)
- streamlining the digitisation of data – patient records, etc. (52.54%)

## Future investments - solutions being planned by practices?

- enhanced systems to support online consultations (37.04%)
- greater use of mobile devices (33.33%)
- introduction of patient management solutions (29.63%)
- improve online solutions (27.78%)
- scanning and document management solutions (25.93%)



## INTRODUCTION

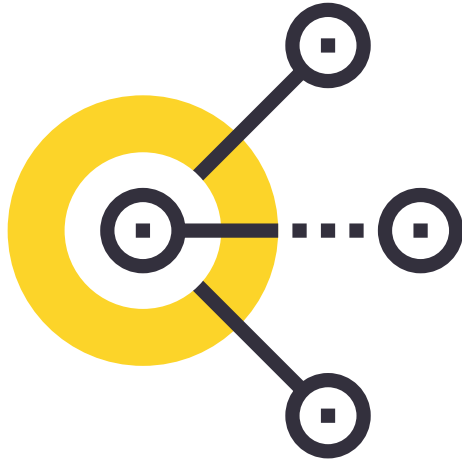
### The future is digital

General practice is faced with a very real challenge: delivering healthcare to a growing – and ageing – population with more complex needs and higher expectations, coupled with a finite pool of resources. The weight of this challenge is being felt right across the NHS; those working in the sector consistently report their fears that workload pressures are becoming unmanageable and administrative tasks are taking over. This is impacting workforce wellbeing and recruitment, as well as the delivery of care.

**“At GP practice level, technology is gaining traction as a possible way to streamline the delivery of healthcare ”**

To overcome these challenges, new models of care and modes of operation are being developed. NHS service providers are increasingly looking to technology to support these new models and, at GP practice level, technology is gaining traction as a possible way to streamline the delivery of healthcare. This is backed and promoted by government – as illustrated by recent investment, and health secretary Matt Hancock’s own ‘tech-vision’ for the NHS, which he outlined in autumn 2018.

The health secretary’s plans build on existing ones, such as *Paperless 2020*; they seek to improve digital-agility and support the deployment of the technology necessary to develop new care models and, importantly, facilitate the digital-delivery of care for patients. He identifies two key tech-obstacles to this: ‘clunky’ systems and a lack of ‘interoperability’. Interoperability relates to the current inability of computer systems/software to exchange and make use of information. Mr. Hancock sees mandatory IT standards and cloud services as essential to overcoming these barriers.



What does this mean at practice level? Resource limitations, ingrained working practices, scepticism and outmoded legacy systems make a simple switch to digital-first systems seem anything from unlikely to impossible. There is much discussion of what the key 'pinch points' actually are – with many opinions as to what is needed to move forward along the digital pathway - but what are the actual issues, based on evidence?

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**“We set out to identify the real barriers to change in general practice because, if the sector can understand these, it can find solutions to overcome them ”**

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In conjunction with our partner, business technology solutions' provider Brother UK, we set out to identify what the real barriers to change in general practice are because, if the sector can understand these, it can find solutions to overcome them.

In this white paper we identify the obstacles faced by GP practices, investigate the IT solutions being developed in response and explore the need for investment in technology and infrastructure at practice level. Taking the latest research as our baseline, we have built on this through a reader survey of 135 practice managers, and interviews, to give a comprehensive overview.



## BACKGROUND & RESEARCH

### Current state of the sector

Patient demand is increasing. In 2016, The King's Fund published *Understanding pressures in general practice* in which the authors reported that GPs were dealing with a rising workload, that this workload was becoming increasingly complex and intense and, at the same time, that funding was not growing in line with demand.

These factors are being exacerbated by a shortage of NHS GPs – in part the result of fewer practitioners undertaking full-time clinical work, but also due to large numbers retiring or leaving the profession altogether. Add to this wider system pressures which have resulted in additional, more complex, work falling to general practice to manage and what you have is a system under immense pressure.



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**“What you have is a system under immense pressure”**

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In answer to these growing pressures the *General Practice Forward View* (GPFV) was published by the government. This paper promised additional funding and help for struggling practices; it included plans to reduce the workload and expand the workforce. It announced investment in technology and estates, as well as a General Practice Development Programme to accelerate the transformation of services. However, two years on, general practices are still tackling many of the same challenges, as the British Medical Association makes clear in its analysis, *GPFV - two years on*.

This is not to say that nothing has changed; technology has become a key focus in the fight to ensure a sustainable NHS.

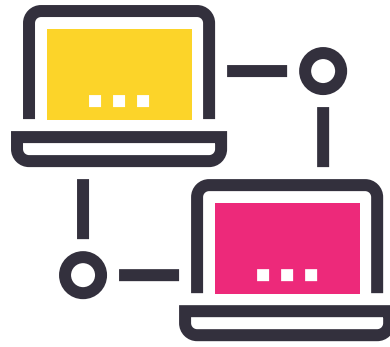


Government initiatives are driving this; for example, the Centre for Policy Studies' 2018 report, *Powerful Patients, Paperless Systems; how technology can renew the NHS*, authored by Alan Mak, MP, sets out a plan for a paperless or, rather, a 'paper-lite', NHS – calling for pagers, fax machines and paper records to be replaced by integrated digital systems. The vision is that digital transformation will allow NHS services to take back control by fostering innovation and empowering staff and patients - and, crucially, saving time and resources.

The paper outlines three essential targets to be achieved over the next decade:

1. to move the NHS from paper-first to digital-first so that 100% of interactions within the health service are digitally-driven by 2028;
2. to build an ecosystem of apps and innovation within and around the NHS, to better serve patients and to put them in control;
3. to ensure that savings from automation and innovation are ploughed back into frontline services, and that budgets increase for research, development and technology training - at least in line with NHS spending.

That the NHS has been tasked with making £22bn in efficiency savings by 2020 makes achieving these targets all the more important; there is a sector-wide focus on evolving the delivery of services so that they are more efficient and better fitted to contemporary healthcare needs. While visions for a paperless NHS have proved premature, there remains a strong case for document management; digitising patient records, for example, is one way that healthcare practitioners see efficiencies being made.



Managed print services (MPS), scan technology and other efficiency-focused solutions have emerged as 'must haves' in a sector seeking to streamline processes, print smarter, realise efficiencies and improve patient experience. According to industry research MPS, for example, can lower print-related operating and IT costs by as much as 30%. The cost of practice printing is more than the price per printed page; it includes supplies, maintenance, repair and hardware acquisition, in addition to the drain on practice staff time.

This supports the approach that Matt Hancock, who has championed controversial healthcare apps such as GP at hand, has set out in his 'tech vision' which is underpinned by a 'modern technology infrastructure' to support digital services to meet the needs of clinicians, patients and managers.

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**"According to industry research MPS, for example, can lower print-related operating and IT costs by as much as 30%"**

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The King's Fund report, *Digital change in health and social care* (2018), also notes that technology can improve quality, efficiency and patient experience in healthcare, as well as supporting more integrated care to the benefit of the health of a population. In fact, most research will back the potential that technology has to enhance and support healthcare services. However, it must be acknowledged that barriers to digital transformation exist; in *Digital change in health and social care*, Harry Evans *et al* turn a spotlight on budgets, attitudes towards risk, workforce constraints and the relationships that exist between care providers and key stakeholders as factors hindering implementation.

The challenge now is to identify how to effectively implement technology solutions to overcome these barriers.

## FINDINGS

### Assessing the general practice perspective

Brother UK and *Practice Business* have, in partnership, investigated the barriers to the effective implementation of technology in general practice. We have reviewed and analysed the existing literature on the subject and have built on this by conducting a reader survey of 135 practice managers and other healthcare practitioners, alongside a number of in-depth interviews.

We have found that patient demand is, unsurprisingly, one of the key challenges general practice faces, and that this is having a predictable effect in terms of workload pressures; it is also a key driver in the adoption of technology. Our research makes clear that technology is widely viewed as a means of alleviating practice pressures – realising operational efficiency, improving patient access to healthcare and enhancing the overall patient experience. Furthermore, while there remain some uncertainties about technology, and its adoption in general practice, GPs and their teams are digitally innovating – albeit cautiously.

### The greatest challenges

When asked what were the greatest challenges faced by GP practices, patient demand (87.72%) was most frequently cited, followed by administrative burden (66.67%) and recruitment and retention issues (61.40%). One practice manager added that a lack of funding is a contributing factor: 'Funding impacts on recruitment; the pay we offer is too low in our area, and we need more staff, but cannot afford more.'

This is in line with existing sector research. *Understanding pressures in general practice*, for



example, also highlights that demand is increasing in practices, that this is reflected in a heavier workload which is more complex and intense, and that, as a result, it is more difficult to recruit and retain sufficient GPs for full-time, patient-facing work.

### Workload pressures

Nearly all respondents (96.61%) said that there has been an increase in workload – again, reflective of the specific challenges identified above. The top reason cited was increasing demand on healthcare services (94.2%) – which could be construed as the result of difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, as well as that of managing a growing administrative burden.

Technology, especially hardware, which is not fit-for-purpose was revealed to be another major contributor to increasing workloads (47.46%) demonstrating that, as demand on services increases, it is important that the right IT is in place to support GP practices and practice staff. When asked if the technology already in place at their practice was effective, 59.32% said it was only 'somewhat effective' – allowing much room for improvement.

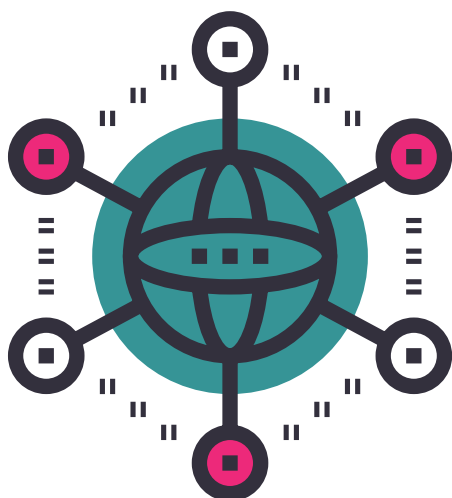
So, while technology can support the delivery of healthcare, it must be the right technology, appropriately tested and absolutely fit-for-purpose. In *Digital change in health and social care* the authors make a case for the careful and considered implementation of technology, identifying the need to independently test any technology before it is implemented to avoid gross waste of limited NHS resources.

Finally, in the wake of May 25, data protection and GDPR compliance was noted as a significant contributor to increasing workloads (42.37%) and something that needed to be considered more carefully by 66.10%.

### The perceived need for technology

What's driving the perceived need for tech?

Respondents pointed to rising demand on health services in terms of increasing numbers of patients with more complex needs and changing patient expectations as they, increasingly, look for greater convenience and online access to services (76.27%).



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## **“Factors contributing to the need for tech solutions to current problems included the requirement for administrative efficiencies and streamlined processes (67.80%)”**

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Other factors contributing to the need for tech solutions to current problems were identified as the push for NHS-wide digital transformation (69.49%), the requirement for administrative efficiencies and streamlined processes (67.80%), new, digital-first systems such as online patient record access, appointment booking and electronic prescription services (EPS) (66.10%) and the desire to successfully implement new models of connected care (66.10%).

Here, again, the need to employ technology to realise efficiencies and lighten workloads takes centre stage. However, a focus on the evolution of health services is also revealed, an acknowledgement that NHS-wide digital transformation, connected care and new models of care require evolved technology to support them. Practices accept that they need technology that is fit for contemporary healthcare needs – serving an increasingly digitally sophisticated society. General practice appears to be willing to embrace a digital infrastructure provided they can be assured that this will be both effective and sustainable in the future.

Technology that is fit for the future must, by definition, be flexible and scalable; given the constraints on budgets, where practices already have hardware installed, they will need to consider carefully how this can be upgraded and what system adaptations may be required.

## Patients and practices – the tech benefits

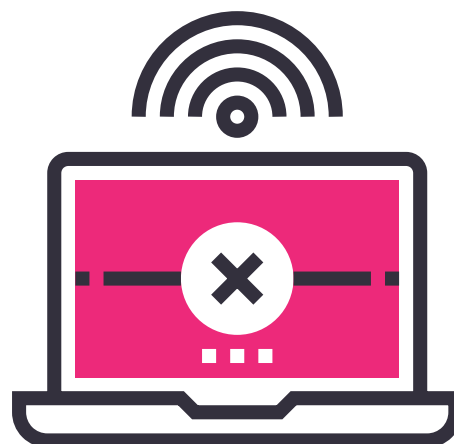
In general, technology is seen by survey respondents as beneficial for both practice and patients – particularly when it comes to delivering a more efficient service. When asked, 'What are the greatest benefits to the practice?' respondents cited increased efficiencies (81.36%), reduced administrative workload (79.66%), time saved (74.58%) and improved patient experience (66.10%).

When focusing their responses on benefits to patients, respondents said that technology made their services more convenient or efficient (86.44%) and provided more connected care (76.27%), better access to care (69.49%) and better health outcomes (44.07%).

One respondent added that technology had the potential to improve communication with patients and commented on its powerful impact on the important issue of patient engagement: 'Engaging with patients through their own media systems means they are better informed and, therefore, feel listened to and valued. They are more likely to engage with health services.'

Clearly, respondents believe that better practice processes can be achieved through innovative and effective technology, and can help to deliver a more efficient and satisfying experience for patients. Furthermore, as technology removes traditional barriers to care, especially in terms of communication and information-sharing, patients will benefit from more connected care and improved access to care.

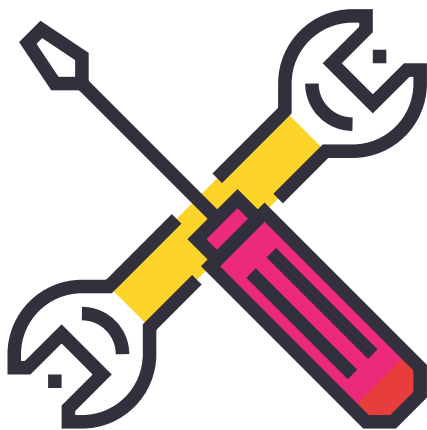
That technology is capable of positively disrupting current activity and ways of working is clear from these responses – although it is important to note the caution voiced by some practice managers, one of whom was of the opinion that technology can only serve to



enhance existing processes and practice operations. In the blog post *Technology in general practice: a vehicle for change?*, published by Nuffield Trust in 2016, Stephanie Kumpunen and Sophie Castle-Clarke set out how technology could aid the transformation of general practice, and allude to some of these points. However, they also note that there are barriers which practices need to consider – infrastructure, compatible systems, change in culture, patient reluctance and, of course, funding.

## Administration, 'paperless' NHS and digital-first systems

We asked readers what areas they would need to consider more carefully in the face of the digital transformation being relentlessly driven forward in the NHS today. That the majority of respondents identified administrative processes (74.58%) suggests a rethinking on the part of practice staff. Administrative processes are certainly a key area in which digital transformation is gaining ground; there are multiple opportunities to streamline processes, print smarter, share information, connect systems, collect, manage and store patient data and realise efficiencies. Respondents appear to have embraced these possibilities, can see that they are starting to make a difference, and so this is where their focus lies.



Even as we continue to encounter hopeful references to a 'paperless' NHS, 49.15% of respondents said that 20-to-50% of their documentation is on paper. Admin still consumes vast tracts of time; 37.29% of respondents said that they spend six hours or more on administrative duties and 27.12% reported spending more than four hours, but fewer than six hours, on admin.

With these figures in mind, if the aim is to improve efficiency and reduce the burden of admin in GP practices, we must consider the paper-created workload and the ways in which practice leaders are managing this. Feedback from survey respondents suggested that printers and printer management is an area to be considered. In addition to digitising paper documents, using scan technology and solutions such as managed print services and Brother Print Services for Health offer a seamless answer to an over-burdened NHS.

According to 62.71% of respondents, additional human resources would help reduce time spent on admin – their top suggestion. On the technology front, 59.32% said that better software which connects multiple touch points, within the practice and beyond, would be

beneficial, and the streamlining of digitisation of data – patient records, etc. – would ease the admin burden for 52.54%. A high number of respondents, 71.19%, said that they would need to give careful consideration to the implementation of connected systems.

Data protection and GDPR compliance was also high on the list of considerations, with 66.10% of respondents flagging this issue, while 55.93% felt that upgraded technology (hardware), which is more efficient and fit-for-purpose, would help. A further point made by respondents was the adoption of solutions that automated day-to-day tasks - in this case, the ordering of inks and toners. The auto-replenishment of inks and toners, standard aspects of managed print services, can certainly deliver savings in terms of both money and time.

#### Identifying the barriers

Why, then, are digital practices and technology not being fully embraced in order to realise these efficiencies which practice staff themselves are quick to identify? As noted in *Digital change in health and social care*, barriers exist, and these are holding care providers back. In the general practice setting, according to our survey respondents, these include funding (86.44%) and human resources (61.02%) – both of which require greater investment in the health sector. Lack of knowledge about new technology (57.63%) was also high on respondents' list of barriers.

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**“Even as we continue to encounter hopeful references to a 'paperless' NHS, 49.15% of respondents said that 20-to-50% of their documentation is on paper ”**

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## **“The challenge now is to identify how to effectively implement technology solutions to overcome these barriers ”**

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Fourth on the list was a lack of interoperability; existing systems which are incompatible with new technology was cited by 47.46% of respondents and interoperability was highlighted by secretary of state Matt Hancock in his ‘tech-vision’ as something that needs to be overcome – so it’s clearly an issue that’s gathering momentum right across the NHS.

If GP practices are to deliver agile and connected care, and share insights and information with other providers, then barriers such as these must be considered and broken down.

### **Future investments**

Turning to the solutions which GP practices are planning to introduce there seems to be a push towards delivering convenience for patients - an answer to growing patient demand and expectations, and one which would also save time for practice staff. Just over a third (37.04%) of respondents said that they would like to see enhanced systems to support online consultations; this would deliver better access to care for patients and also free up consultation time.

Mobile devices (33.33%) were also identified as a technology that respondents were considering introducing, suggesting a step towards a paperless practice where communications can be sent in the tap of a screen. This echoes the earlier comment of one respondent (page 14) on the importance of, ‘Engaging with patients through their own media systems...’

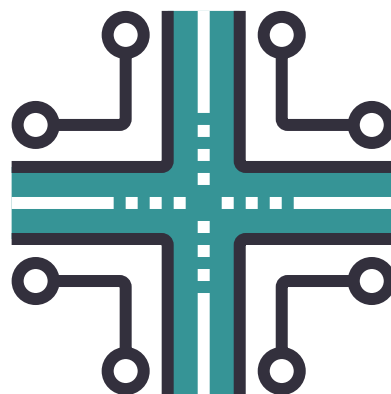
The use of mobile devices, such as tablets, is now becoming commonplace in wifi-enabled practices and supports new, more flexible ways of working; practice staff are not restricted to working in one space, at one computer, connected to just one printer, but can work in transit - or even beyond the confines of the practice.

A significant number of respondents (29.63%) said they were looking to introduce patient management solutions, suggesting a focus on streamlining patient management and care, while 27.78% said that they were intending to improve their online solutions – again, seeking to improve patient access and reduce the administrative workload in terms of appointments, access to patient records and repeat prescriptions, as well as general enquiries.

Scanning and document management solutions (25.93%) were also on the agenda for more than a quarter of practices, further suggesting a willingness to embrace the digital-first/paper-lite practice.







## FURTHER DISCUSSION

### Tech-led solutions

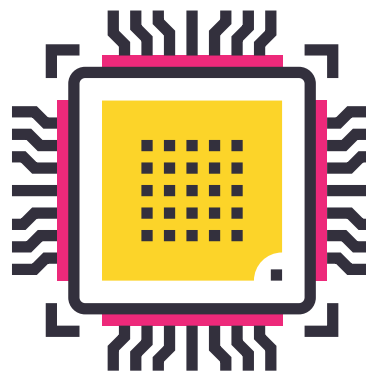
Increasing demand on healthcare services was identified as a key challenge in our research, and the main contributing factor to growing workloads within general practice. In his speech at the Conservative party conference in Birmingham, back in September 2018, health secretary Matt Hancock said that more funding must be allocated to primary care to reduce pressure on A&E services.

An already stretched primary care sector will certainly require tangible support if it is to be able to take some of the strain from the hospital sector. The government's Digital Transformation Programme (DTP) is intended to provide this support; it aims to remove a massive workload burden from GPs and, in turn, front-of-house practice staff.

Although the roll out on this has been slow, it is already providing patients with access to online services - for example, e-consulting, patient portals and online access to patient records and appointment bookings.

Technology offers general practice the opportunity to realise greater efficiencies - for practice teams and also for patients - and things are changing, digitally, behind the scenes. Since January 1, 2018, there has been a requirement that practices are wifi-enabled throughout and, in addition to administrative areas, nearly every consulting room will now have a printer. This additional capacity means that MPS are already delivering tangible benefits for GP practices across the country.

Answering demand, and seeking to deliver a more robust care service, in addition to the administrative areas of a practice, nearly every consulting room will now have a printer.



While, traditionally, practice managers will have used a transactional model to manage their fleet of printers, they can now benefit from using managed print solutions that better streamline this process for their practices. This will inevitably free up time for staff to focus on meeting the demands of patients, moving away from the administrative burden of ordering and managing supplies. It will also ensure that the day-to-day operation of GP practices isn't impacted by printer downtime, keeping productivity at its highest.

Other solutions include fully-automated, wifi-enabled, options which provide access to the cloud. Brother Print Services for Health can eradicate the need for user intervention, making everything automated. Solutions like this help practice staff to work smarter, rather than harder - allowing them to better manage increasing demand more effectively and focus their efforts on the more important areas of their work.

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**“Brother Print Services for Health can eradicate the need for user intervention, making everything automated. Solutions like this help practice staff to work smarter, rather than harder”**

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The scanning of paper documents - which can then be more easily managed and shared - is another area of significant note that has emerged to reduce the admin burden in practices. These online document workflow and capture solutions are becoming increasingly important in streamlining GP practice admin processes; Docman 10 was identified by respondents as one such solution they were already engaging with. Such solutions are enabling practices to share information with colleagues and patients in familiar ways - addressing increasing demand in terms of changing expectations among both patients and staff.



### Building a sustainable NHS

While there is no doubt that technology is key to a sustainable NHS, respondents identified technology that is not fit-for-purpose as a key contributor to increasing workloads; the majority reported that the technology they have in place is only 'somewhat effective'. Why is this? *Digital change in health and social care* argues that this is a facet of implementation and whether the right checks are in place to ensure the IT across the NHS actually works. This is very important at the individual practice level, and established providers understand this.

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## **"Respondents identified technology that is not fit-for-purpose as a key contributor to increasing workloads"**

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More than this, ensuring a sustainable future for the NHS is about future proofing; only in this way can technology purchases be truly cost-effective. When purchasing new technology, even if the practice isn't going to use all its potential straight away, industry recommendations point to the purchase of wifi-enabled devices.

In relation to printer procurement, this enables printing via the cloud; for example, wifi allows tablet devices to connect and print directly. This brings a new level of flexibility which is changing the way that healthcare providers work while also improving the patient experience.



### Reaching greater heights of efficiency

Technology offers general practice the opportunity to realise greater efficiencies - for the practice team and also for patients; for example, the usefulness of digitising documents and managing them online creates a much more efficient way of working. Modern scanners allow users to create searchable PDFs in seconds which can be archived and retrieved much more quickly than paper documents. Security is an additional benefit that comes with this move to new technology; digitising documents is a more secure way of storing them and removes potential issues such as damage as a result of water or fire.

While there has been a massive push towards a paperless NHS, the responses to our survey clearly show that paper and printing remain central to practice processes. Research suggests that there has been a shift in who is printing what - for example, digital-first processes have moved the responsibility for printing prescriptions away from the practice and into the pharmacy, in some cases. They are starting to print smart – practices used to print a lot and file a lot. Now they are learning what it is essential to print, and what can be digitalised and stored electronically – which makes search and retrieval easier. In these ways they take control – they choose what to print and what to store electronically. This is a growing trend which is saving practices much needed time and money.

So, the sector is becoming 'paper-lite', but this is not the same as 'paper-free'. Until the fabled paperless office arrives, practices will need to employ the most effective and efficient strategies possible in order to streamline paper handling and processing; the right tech solutions can certainly help with this. Understanding what and how a practice is printing, having printing hardware positioned in the optimum location(s), maintaining control and visibility of print and print costs – for example, through the auto-replenishment of inks and toners - can all deliver savings in terms of both money and time. A managed print service will deliver all this, and more.

## COMMENT

### **When it comes to efficiency in practices, every little helps; Frazer Whitehead, senior public-sector account manager at Brother UK**

As this report makes clear, the health service remains under intense pressure to make its stretched budget go as far as possible.

With more than a third of respondents saying they spend more than six hours per week on administrative duties – and almost two thirds spending more than four hours – it's clear that easing this burden is a key part of the overall challenge.

It's also clear that paper-based systems continue to play an important role. Innovations that cut the amount of time staff spend handling documents – or on maintaining the equipment needed to do so – will help reduce wasted time that could otherwise be spent improving patient services.

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### **“Innovations that cut the amount of time staff spend handling documents will help reduce wasted time that could otherwise be spent improving patient services”**

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At Brother, the Managed Print Service (MPS) we offer is designed to do just that, by looking at printing as a service, rather than leaving responsibility for maintenance and consumables' replacement with the organisation itself. We own the hardware, and handle everything from system design and installation to technical support and supplies' ordering.

There are several ways this can help organisations use their resources more efficiently.

Firstly, auditing the way printers are used in a longstanding institution often reveals poor alignment between the hardware available and the way it is used. We frequently see examples of many printers sitting, almost unused, in offices while those in key, patient-facing areas are stretched to breaking point and beyond.

Designing a print system based on intelligence about actual usage removes these inefficiencies and pinch points.

A properly co-ordinated installation programme, including staff training and ongoing support, takes the burden away from in-house teams.

Next, customers benefit from a full monitoring service, where printer usage and performance is continuously observed, and predictive



maintenance carried out – so repairs or replacement happen before a printer develops an unexpected fault. This significantly increases reliability and reduces the likelihood of IT staff having to spend time fixing issues.

Finally, all supplies' ordering and recycling is taken care of so, whenever a toner runs out, a new one will be waiting in its place – no 'phone calls or online orders needed. Again, this cuts unhelpful distractions for busy staff who have better things to do.

For those who don't need the full MPS package there is also Brother Print Service (BPS), where our team will take over supplies ordering and delivery for an existing fleet of printers to ensure you get the best out of them and reduce admin time for practice staff.

As the move towards using less paper in the health service continues, practices have an ever-increasing need to digitise information accurately and securely. Robust, reliable and user-friendly scanners are essential in this.

However office space is often limited, particularly at reception desks, and security is also a key concern, so compactness of the hardware is a priority too.

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**“Anything that shaves off even one or two button presses per scanned document can add up to a significant time saving over a period of weeks, months and years ”**

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Brother offers an extensive range of options that fit the bill, occupying a minimal footprint while still including the features that can deliver an efficient workflow for staff tasked with digitising documents. These include versatile scan-to-destination features that allow documents to be created automatically in whatever location is required, be it a folder on a local network or Microsoft Sharepoint - or a host of other cloud and mobile applications.

Anything that shaves off even one or two button presses per scanned document can add up to a significant time saving over a period of weeks, months and years.

Ultimately, when it comes to healthcare, Brother's end goal is for practice staff to spend more time with patients and less with technology.





## CONCLUSION

### What now? Developing and sustaining a digital-first system in your practice

There has been a shift towards digital in the healthcare sector - one that is reflective of a wider digital shift in society as a whole. The NHS is rising to patient demands - the number and complexity of their needs, as well as their rising expectations; technology is central to meeting these aspirations.

Our world is becoming wifi-enabled and this is changing how we live and work; general practice is stepping out of the past and into the future by embracing new technologies – our joint survey provides sound evidence of a willingness among practice staff to embrace new technologies which work and are proven to make their lives, and those of their patients, easier. Brother UK believes that managed services for new hardware and existing solutions are the way forward.



Similarly, cloud solutions will be essential to practices seeking to adopt the technologies that will pave the way for new efficiencies. The cloud will facilitate the mobile and portable technologies – which are starting to have traction – that will improve communications and how staff work within the practice and when out in the community, saving on time and delivering an improved service for patients.

Practice managers certainly need to ensure that the technology they are operating is fit-for-purpose and will 'speak' to other devices within the practice and beyond. Hopefully, secretary of state Matt Hancock will provide the funding necessary to ensure that all practices enjoy interoperability in the very near future; as he has highlighted, it's a crucial element in creating digital-first health provision.

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Brother UK

Brother UK has provided innovative technology solutions for healthcare for more than 25 years and is a key stakeholder in the primary care sector. They share our passion for supporting the sector with knowledge and insights which will improve and develop solutions for a fast-changing sector. Frazer Whitehead, senior public sector account manager at Brother UK, has been our Brother consultant on this white paper.

### Practice Business

Our health website, *Practice Business* is a management agenda platform focusing on the business, management and delivery of healthcare at practice level.

We offer practice managers and GP partners targeted information and insight relating to the business and management of GP practices, relevant and tailored information and ideas that help general practice leaders and partners to navigate the changing landscape of health, manage growing sector expectations and achieve better patient outcomes. Content is delivered across a range of media so that our audience can choose how they access it.

Our driving force at *Practice Business* is to present information that will aid practice managers and GP partners in their day-to-day roles. We provide sector-specific information and also address general business management issues. We pride ourselves on the curation of valuable and timely content.