

The logo for Political Intelligence, featuring a stylized green and white checkered pattern to the left of the text.

Political
Intelligence

Innovation in the NHS

The Accelerated Access Review

August 2018

Introduction

Medical innovations are never far from headlines – surgical robots, portable blood pumps and the world’s first digital pill are just a few of the devices and technologies that make up a diverse and innovative global MedTech sector. In the UK, where roughly 3,700 companies, 98% of which are SMEs, the sector generates a turnover of £21 billion, acting as a pillar of the broader life science sector.

The NHS is arguably under more financial pressure than it has ever faced before in its 70-year history and new and innovative technologies can reduce bed days, ease pressures on busy A&E departments and overworked clinicians. Although the upfront cost of some new technologies can be high, the long-term benefits include saving the NHS money while making a measurable difference to patient care. There have been concerns raised however, across Government, academia and health bodies, that little of this wealth of innovation reaches patients quickly enough.

Breaking down barriers - the Accelerated Access Review

A number of barriers have been identified that inhibit the adoption and spread of innovation through the NHS. One of them is undeniably a lack of funding. Along with this however, comes several market access and reimbursement obstacles that limit the ability and speed of products to reach patients.

When products are finally taken up, they often face further problems. Technologies can lack the evidence to show they can be adapted at scale by a large and complex system, and therefore struggle to spread throughout the NHS, remaining within a limited number of trusts. Introducing new products onto a clinical pathway also requires clinicians to be trained how to use them, often a time-consuming process.

In 2014, the Government commissioned Sir Hugh Taylor to chair an independent review of how to best speed up access to innovative drugs, devices, diagnostics and digital products.

The resulting report was published two years later, following input from over 600 people and organisations. The report made a series of ambitious recommendations, including an enhanced horizon scanning process for innovative products, an ‘Accelerated Access Pathway’ to bring transformative products to patients more quickly streamlined, clarified national routes to market and the introduction of incentives to support the local uptake and spread of innovation.



“I don’t think our problem is innovation in this country. We’re a creative bunch, with both public and private investment ready to help. The real challenge is taking innovation, getting it into the NHS and spreading it through the system”.

– Lord O’Shaughnessy, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health

Implementing the Accelerated Access Review

The Government's response to the report was announced in November 2017 and set out how government, industry and the health system could collaborate to create a more streamlined system for 'cost-effective breakthrough products'. It acknowledged that the complexity of current pathways hinders the uptake of innovation but also added that the Accelerated Access Review's recommendations would have to be delivered 'within the budgetary envelope set by the Government for the NHS'.

The response does take forward the suggestion of an Accelerated Access Pathway (AAP), which will bring forward patient access to highly beneficial products by up to 4 years. The Government anticipate that up to five products a year will benefit from this Pathway. The creation of a Strategic Commercial Unit in NHS England, as recommended in the original Review, was also announced with the aim of negotiating mutually beneficial commercial deals with industry.

The Government's response also announced the creation of an Accelerated Access Collaborative, comprising very senior representatives from Government, national organisations such as NHS England, NICE and NHS Improvement, and representatives for patients, industry and clinicians. Their core role will be to choose products for the Pathway and work towards ensuring that innovation is delivered at a price that both industry and the health services views as fair and affordable, and this plays a part in their wider aim of working towards making the

NHS one of the most pro-innovation healthcare systems.

It is important to note that the Government's official response also highlighted a number of policies and interventions that were already being implemented within this space, such as a £6m scheme to support SMEs obtain evidence for medtech products qualifying for the Early Access to Medicines Scheme (EAMS) and a £39m of funding to the Academic Health Science Networks, who work on a local and national scale to support industry, especially SMEs. The funding will enable them to coordinate 'innovation exchanges' which bring together partners across health, care and industry to quickly identify and spread innovative devices.

The impact – How will industry benefit?

The Government's response has been encouraging in many ways, having taken forward some of the key initiatives originally put forward in the Accelerated Access Review, such as the Pathway and the MedTech industry has welcomed its introduction. However, the AAP is only expected to benefit roughly five products a year – a drop in the ocean when we consider that £1.2bn is spent on researching and developing innovations every year by the NHS alongside the efforts of industry. Concerns have therefore been raised about how those products not deemed transformative yet still proven to enhance patient outcomes, will truly benefit from the implementation of the Accelerated Access Review.

There are hopes however, that this Pathway will be expanded over time. Sir John Bell, Chair of

the Review's Expert Advisory Group, expressed his desire for this when appearing in front of the Lords Science & Technology Committee as part of their inquiry into Life Sciences and the Industrial Strategy. He reminded the Committee that it was important the newly formed Pathway was not inundated straight away, and a limited number of products to start with would allowing

the AAP to be expanded on. The impact of the AAP and associated policy measures will therefore not have an immediate impact on the SME companies which make up 98% of the MedTech sector.

What next for MedTech?

The implementation of the Accelerated Access Review has not been plain sailing, with Sir Andrew Witty standing down as Chair of the Collaborative and thus delaying the introduction of the Pathway, which was due to open in April 2018. A new Chair, Lord Ara Darzi, has recently been appointed however and there are several other initiatives that are taking forward the Review's recommendations. For example, NICE are working with NHS England and other stakeholders to produce a new horizon scanning tool, HealthTech Connect, to improve the identification and tracking of emerging medical technologies, as suggested in the Review.

There have also been a series of policy initiatives such as the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy, which has called for the Accelerated Access Review to be broadened and builds on its recommendations further. The Strategy acted as the foundation of the Government's subsequent 'Life Sciences Sector Deal', published in December, which outlined a series of collaborations between Government and industry across pharma, MedTech and genomics. The Industrial Strategy and the announcement of the Sector Deal both demonstrate that numerous policy initiatives are working towards increasing the uptake of innovations, in conjunction with the Accelerated Access Review.

Significantly, the appointment of new Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock suggests that innovation will take centre stage in future policy announcements. His passion for technology was evident during his time as Culture Secretary and since taking on the health brief he has made clear that the implementation of technologies that save bed-days, enable self-care and improve Britain's cancer survival rates will be a personal priority. While his focus on technology has garnered criticisms from some who warn that the NHS faces more pressing issues, there is no doubt that Hancock's enthusiasm for harnessing the power of innovation is an encouraging sign for the future of MedTech.

About Political Intelligence

For further information on MedTech policy or if you'd like to discuss the ways in which Political Intelligence could support your organisation in your public affairs activity, please get in touch:

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