

Health Secretary focus on tech and child obesity

The recently appointed health and social care secretary Matt Hancock has stressed the importance of greater use of technology in the NHS and efforts to tackle childhood obesity, during his first speech in post.

During a speech delivered at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, on 20 July 2018, Hancock said: 'These are my early priorities across health and care: across the whole health and social care system. Workforce, technology, and prevention.'

Because the health service was 'one NHS', the health system was uniquely placed to become the most advanced health system in the world and one where technology addressed the user need to make care better for patients while also making life better for staff, he argued.

'For too long, decisions on health and care have seemed to involve a trade-off – improving patient outcomes at the expense of placing ever more pressure on staff, while reducing the demands on staff has been seen to have an impact on patient care,' said Hancock.

'Technology and data innovation offers an opportunity to move past this binary approach.'

Hancock announced a half a billion pound package to help 'jump start the rollout of innovative technology aimed at improving care for patients and supporting staff to embrace technology-driven health and care.'

Transforming technology would not be optional, he added, saying that the entire £20 billion extra resources for the NHS by 2023-24

announced earlier in July by Prime Minister Theresa May would be contingent on 'modern technological transformation'.

Hancock mentioned the word 'technology' 35 times during his speech, more than 'patients' (17 times) or 'doctors' (seven times). Dentists were not mentioned directly during the speech.

Prevention of ill health was becoming increasingly important, he added, with areas such as childhood obesity and the consequences of poor dental health being a part of that.

'We are now addressing the shocking levels of childhood obesity which is often the starting gun for long-term health conditions later in life,' he said.

'But to make the most of the extra £20 billion taxpayers are rightly investing in our health service we must take a holistic approach to prevention.'

1. Department of Health and Social Care. Matt Hancock speech. 20 July 2018. Available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/matt-hancock-my-priorities-for-the-health-and-social-care-system> (accessed on 23 July 2018).



Health and Social Care Secretary
Matt Hancock

(Image courtesy of UK Parliament, CC BY 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>)

School children to be trained in healthy eating

School children are to be taught how to cut down on biscuits and sugary drinks in a new drive to tackle growing childhood obesity and achieve good dental health.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds unveiled on 19 July 2018 a new compulsory health education programme that will warn against food and drink with high calorie and sugar content.

The document proposes that pupils should know:

- What constitutes a healthy diet
- The characteristics of a poor diet and risks associated with unhealthy eating (including, for example, obesity) and other behaviours (such as the impact of alcohol on diet or health).

They should also know how to maintain healthy eating and the links between a poor diet and health risks, including eating disorders and cancer.

More specifically, under the plans, schools will be expected to continue to develop knowledge on topics specified for primary school and cover content by the end of secondary school on various areas such as health and prevention, including dental health, the benefits of good oral hygiene, and visits to the dentist.

If all approved, the proposals will become mandatory for schools from September 2020.

The consultation closes on 7 November 2018.

1. Department for Education. Relationships (and sex) education and health education: Open consultation (July 2018). <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/relationships-and-sex-education-and-health-education> (accessed on 23 July 2018).