

# The Promise of IT and Making Life More Connected and Patients Safer

After escaping the IT industry in 1993 and joining the NHS, I am now in my third decade of this dream.

Back in 1994, working at a practice in Prestatyn that plans to hand back their contract next year, I arranged a demonstration to Ysbyty Glan Clwyd of what joined-up IT looked like.

Even then, it looked like GP clinical systems now, with all the things we have not had until recently. It worked across primary, secondary and community care boundaries and across national boundaries, translated any EU language into any other; even Welsh.

The system, that had EU funding, sadly failed to make it in the solid-state NHS where the average time from idea to general acceptance is 26 years.

So why has the NHS, we, two decades and many billions of expenditure later barely started to integrate systems?

More importantly, how do you make it happen?

I have some thoughts:

- **Tell** every current provider of IT systems that unless they use open source coding that their contracts will be terminated in 2018. They have had years of opportunity and encouragement, it is time to see it enforced rigorously.
- **Make** providers more responsive to customer need - even the provider I used to think an exemplar has recently felt like any another and more interested in profit margin and shareholder return than in giving customers what they need.
- **At the risk of sounding Lansley-like** (but, more properly, like the Liberals), clear out a level-or-two of middle-to-senior/senior management in the decision-making process. They take too long to achieve little. Though, in fairness, this should be matched with a halt to political change and a simplification of our target-driven, over inspected NHS.
- **Find a Champion** and provide the independence of power and the resources to effect a re-boot.
- **Rally general practice** behind the drive. There are over 7,000 practices in England in which we apocryphally conduct 90% of healthcare and the only reason that MPs, the DH, et al concentrate on the 100-plus DGHs is that those are big enough to see from London and finance can only do big numbers. (They do not seem to understand that saving £1 a million times is better than saving £1,000 a hundred times.)
- **NHS IT** management needs to become a facilitator rather than a dictator. They need to help practices and their local DGH connect, not tell us both how we are going to do it.

I am counting days to taking pension, and though I will not be retiring I am on a countdown. That focuses the mind and makes people fearless. I have no future left in the NHS to worry about.