



Who do you believe?

Do you believe in Father Christmas? Saint Nicolas, Santa Claus, call him what you will, he's got quite a few titles actually. That's what happens when you're a world-wide phenomenon. To millions, he's the twinkly-eyed, avuncular figure, slightly wide of girth and always dressed in that fetching scarlet outfit. As worldwide brands go, Santa and Coke are up there – although one suspects Coke is probably marginally more socially acceptable in parts of the Middle East than the jolly-faced harbinger of a Christian festival.

Anyway, Santa's all about bringing goodwill, joy and loads of goodies to everybody irrespective of colour, race or creed. Pulled by Dasher, Dancer, Prancer et al, and with the aid of thousands of little helpers, he manages to whizz around the world on Christmas Eve, pop down the chimney, eat a mince pie, slurp a glass of Granny's special sherry and pop back to Lapland to prepare for next year.

No mean feat, that. And we want to believe it. We really, really do...

Santa's personal challenges might have rung a few sleigh bells if you'd been present at Healthchat's Christmas Special at the King's Fund on Monday night where Tim Kelsey, NHS England's National Director for Patients and Information was on the stand being interviewed by Roy Lilley. Kelsey must occasionally feel a weight of expectation on his shoulders akin to that of Father Christmas himself.

There's no doubt whatever that if there is someone to get the job of "making the NHS more intelligent about the way it uses data", then Kelsey's credentials stand him in good stead. This is a man who, as a journalist, was embedded with the Army in Iraq and investigated the shady businessman, Asil Nadir. And he's even survived playing bass in jazz clubs. He's clearly passionate about making Care.data a reality – and, despite admitting to having been bruised by what he refers to as the "car crash" around the launch, he appears surprisingly unbowed by the experience thus far. Lessons from the car crash? That "we didn't explain very well what the benefits are of collecting data...". It must be especially irksome to have to admit this because as Kelsey pointed out, for the sake of a few Nectar points, we give away vast quantities of data to supermarkets every day without batting an eye.



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Kelsey was challenged robustly by Lilley and from the floor about the reality of achieving the ambitions laid out in *Care.data* and *Personalised Health and Care 2020*. Lilley asked him outright if it was just all too ambitious. How would he realistically corral all the NHS's disparate fiefdoms and end up with consensus? What are the key milestones that will reassure us that it's all on track? How would you join up health and social care data? And, the common theme, where's the money coming from to achieve what you might call *TK Max* when we can't get the basics right?

Kelsey talked in general terms about sweating the assets, making better use of resources and doing more with less. All, or most however, will be clarified in the forthcoming *Planning Guidance* due out very soon. Something that will please reindeers everywhere is that we were assured "it's much less about sticks and more about carrots." Anyway, the Guidance will be all the more eagerly awaited given the extraordinarily positive reaction to Simon Stevens' *Five Year Forward View*.

Kelsey talked in terms of working through a transition period "to get to the other side of the revolution." Hurrah to that – but won't people be a bit sceptical of their data being collected unless they choose to opt out? He recognises NHS England has got to "do a world class job in informing patients of their rights."

The evening's audience was knowledgeable and, it seemed, hugely supportive of what Kelsey has set out to achieve. Equally, they were right to ask if it really is achievable given the continued squeeze on national and local economies.

Father Christmas did make a personal appearance at the evening and just for a moment, Santa and Kelsey looked each other in the eye as if to say, "so, you'd prefer *my* job...?"

Merry Christmas, all!

Angus "Santa" Wrixon



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