

News story: NHS hospitals and GP practices to get fibre optic internet

Health Secretary Matt Hancock has announced plans to upgrade every hospital, GP practice and community care service to full fibre connectivity.

Almost 40% of NHS organisations are using slow and unreliable internet supplied through copper lines, which restricts the ability to offer digital services to patients.

Today's announcement supports ambitions in the NHS Long Term Plan to expand and improve online access to NHS services. Under the plan:

- every patient will get the right to choose a 'digital first' approach to primary healthcare, meaning that more of the 307 million patient consultations with GPs each year would in future be offered online, through video consultation, as well as face to face
- hospital outpatient clinics will also be redesigned with more 'virtual clinics' involving video consultations with consultants and nurses, supplemented by face-to-face appointments where necessary
- cloud-based patient records will help clinicians access crucial information, including high-resolution images, anywhere in the country, improving patient safety and speeding up appointments

Upgrading broadband will provide the fast, more reliable connections necessary for video consultations and sharing high-definition images at speed.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

"Every day, our NHS staff do amazing work – but too often they are let down by outdated and unreliable technology. It's simply unbelievable that a third of NHS organisations are using internet that can sometimes be little better than dial-up.

"To give people control over how they access NHS services, I want to unlock the full potential of technology – this is the future for our 21st century healthcare system and a central part of our NHS Long Term Plan.

"Faster broadband connections can help us deliver these dramatic improvements – we need clinicians and other healthcare professionals to feel confident they can access fast, reliable broadband so they can provide patients with the best possible care."