

Press release: Investment to transform access to data to help pioneer new patient treatments

- Digital innovation hubs, part of our modern Industrial Strategy, to be created to transform the way researchers and innovators can access data from the NHS
- Innovators will be able to access data more easily and use it in their efforts to find cures and treatments for diseases including cancer and diabetes
- The project may also enable scientists to find ways to diagnose disease earlier, speed up drug development, and give people faster access to more personalised treatments

Plans to transform the way scientists access health data are being backed by £37million of Industrial Strategy Government investment, to pioneer new, faster treatments for patients and new cures for diseases.

The new centres across the UK – known as Digital Innovation Hubs – will enable scientists and innovators to access data from the NHS, universities and social care to deliver more efficient clinical trials. They can use the data to answer the most important and complex questions about people's health in the future.

The centres will make data accessible from some of the UK's major health providers in one place for the first time, including the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These will allow experts to research the factors behind many familiar common diseases and identify revealing data trends which may help with finding cures or treatments.

The information will go through a de-identification and encryption process to preserve privacy.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

Access to anonymised health data has huge potential to allow us to better understand diseases and develop life-saving new drugs and treatments.

The Digital Innovation Hubs, backed by over £37million of Industrial Strategy investment, will ensure researchers, innovators and clinicians can access a large quantity of anonymised data responsibly and ethically – allowing them to pioneer new medicines and treatments.

These hubs are a major part of our modern Industrial Strategy, building on the UK's world leading life sciences sector and health service to the benefit of researchers, industry and patients.

The project, led by Health Data Research UK (HDR-UK), aims to improve health and care in the UK in areas like speeding up drug development and giving people faster access to more personalised treatments. It also aims to help in diagnosing diseases earlier and help in wider efforts to find cures and treatments, including for conditions such as cancer.

Health Minister Nicola Blackwood said:

It is absolutely crucial that researchers are able to access the NHS's world-leading anonymised data so they can develop cutting-edge treatments and solutions to some of healthcare's biggest challenges. This will mean people can receive new medicines quicker and get more timely diagnoses which will ultimately save lives.

As part of our Long Term Plan, we are determined to encourage more innovation in the NHS than ever before so patients benefit from the best medicines and technologies.

A £3 million trial is underway with 10 projects across the UK. In Manchester, patients with already implanted pacemakers and defibrillators will have their health data analysed in real-time to detect signs of deterioration earlier and prevent hospital admissions.

About 1,000 patients with heart failure, being cared for by Manchester Royal Infirmary, already had an implantable device such as a pacemaker or defibrillator which captures information about their health. The project's clinical team used the data to detect signs of deterioration earlier and to transform care for the patient.

The new centres will be selected through a competition and are expected to be established by the end of this year.

They will also be tasked with ensuring responsible access to anonymised health data in a trustworthy and ethical way, by involving patients to ensure that benefits are returned to the NHS for the greater public good.

The £37.5 million investment in Digital Innovation Hubs is a key part of the modern Industrial Strategy, and its Data to Early Diagnosis and Precision Medicine Challenge. Backed by a total of up to £210million Government investment, it aims to combine data and real-world evidence from across the health service to create new products and services to help diagnose diseases earlier and more efficiently.

This also forms part of wider work to ensure the UK remains a world-leader in

the life sciences sector, already worth nearly £74billion to the UK economy. In December 2018, the government agreed a second life sciences sector deal, drawing substantial investment into the sector from across the world, ensuring that the next wave of breakthrough treatments, innovative medical research and technologies, and high skilled jobs are created in Britain.

Professor Andrew Morris, Director of Health Data Research UK, said:

We are excited about the tremendous opportunities that Digital Innovation Hub Programme brings to the future of health research and innovation in the UK. Working closely with UK Research and Innovation, our focus in delivering these new centres of excellence is first and foremost on ensuring that patients reap the rewards and are reassured that all data are used ethically and responsibly.

The UK has a high energy community that brings together leading health experts, entrepreneurs and data scientists. When combined with the UK's ability to bring data together from hospitals, patients, public health and laboratories, we can power an open innovation platform that improves the health and care of people living with cancer, diabetes and heart disease and make the UK the place for ethical data research.

Notes to Editors

1. The Digital Innovation Hub programme forms part of the modern Industrial Strategy's Data to Early Diagnosis and Precision Medicine Challenge led on behalf of UK Research and Innovation by Health Data Research UK (HDR UK).
2. The investment in Digital Innovation Hubs builds on smaller UK digital innovation projects currently underway and also funded through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) that show the exciting potential for larger programmes.
3. For further details about the Digital Innovation Hub Programme visit Health Data Research UK's website <https://www.hdruk.ac.uk/digital-innovation-hubs/>.
4. For information about the funding opportunity visit the MRC website <https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/browse/iscf-dih1/iscf-dih-programme-hubs>