

Speech: Leading the world in developing innovative technologies for patients

Good morning – it is brilliant to be here with you all today.

I know over recent days we've all been inundated by politicians' speeches.

But let me give you some reassurance: I'm not here to announce that I'm running to be Prime Minister, nor to dwell on the consumption of pharmaceuticals that, shall we say, were not produced in line with MHRA GMP guidelines.

I'm instead here to talk about something we actually all care about: healthtech.

Because I know you all share my ambition for the UK to be the world's leading health tech ecosystem – where we pair our formidable expertise in research and development with an NHS that supports and drives the take-up and spread of the most innovative new products.

An ecosystem that does not rest on our laurels, but builds on being a global life sciences hub that:

- received the highest level of foreign direct investment in life science projects in Europe
- has a booming biotech sector, with companies raising £1 billion more than last year's £2.2 billion, with a strong digital sector emerging

Underpinning this performance has been your hard work, ingenuity and innovation. We have also built increasingly strong links between government, industry, the NHS, patients and charities.

The very fact that the industry-led life sciences industrial strategy has been followed by not one but 2 genuinely ambitious sector deals, stands testament to the effectiveness of the UK life sciences ecosystem.

Frankly, when I go to cross-government ministerial meetings, other ministers look enviously on at what the life sciences industry has achieved – and our potential in the years to come.

The opportunity...and the challenge

However, we all know this is no time to get complacent. Working in a hyper-competitive global industry, you all know an important truth: if you do not

relentlessly push for progress, you are finished.

And let me be very clear: I recognise how globally mobile this industry is. If the UK does not remain competitive, you will move to Boston or Singapore, and we will lose jobs and investment.

This is why the work we have done through the sector deals to strengthen our ecosystem is so vital.

Over the last 3 years, the government has invested over £100 million to support healthtech development and adoption, including:

- over £30 million invested in the Digital Health Technology Catalyst to develop the best new digital health solutions
- and over £39 million to strengthen the academic health science networks (AHSNs). Putting boots on the ground to improve local adoption and ensuring the best innovations become available to patients quicker than ever before

And this is making a difference.

Over 200 projects which have received support through the Digital Health Technology Catalyst, and thousands of companies and innovations have been supported by the AHSNs.

This represents good progress, but we must be relentless in our drive to ensure that the UK maintains its place at the cutting edge of health innovation.

And this means ensuring our life science sector continues to support innovative healthtech SMEs to grow into scale companies – to benefit the NHS, patients and the wider UK economy.

To achieve this, we are looking at how healthtech companies can access the finances they need and creating a finance innovation ecosystem which promotes collaboration between the NHS and industry, to ensure new technologies meet NHS priorities and therefore have a ready-made market within the UK.

My ambition is for the NHS to build genuine, deep, trusting partnerships with industry that create long term value – and not to just rely on antiquated buyer-seller relationships.

Remaining at the forefront of innovation

We want the UK to be the best place in the world to develop, test and launch innovative technologies, helping NHS patients to get faster access to new treatments.

It starts with research.

In the 13 years since the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) was created, there has been a transformation in the environment for health research, including supporting research funded by the life sciences industry.

We have taken a 3-pronged approach:

1. We have built the research infrastructure in the NHS required to develop new technologies through investment in developing the medtech and in vitro diagnostic co-operatives, part of a record investment of more than £800 million in NIHR centres and facilities over 5 years from April 2017.
2. Our Clinical Research Network has supported the recruitment of over 725,000 patients – a record number and one we are committed to growing.
3. Once we have the data that shows something works, we support its continued research and development to help it get to market. Our NIHR invention for innovation (i4i) programme has been crucial, supporting more than 240 healthtech projects so far.

And we know how difficult it can be for SMEs to find the funds to develop their product and that is why we have recently added the i4i Connect scheme that specifically supports SMEs with funding boosts of up to £150,000.

We also recognise that good research needs good data. Last week we launched the competition to identify 5 new digital innovation hubs – making globally leading datasets more easily available, bringing clinical trials into the 21st century, and stimulating a new wave of innovation to benefit the UK healthcare system.

A slick and flexible innovation ecosystem

To collaborate and innovate effectively, the UK regulatory framework must also remain slick and easy to navigate for all types of innovators.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has a global reputation for innovation and leadership, and we are determined that this will be maintained in the year ahead. We will also shortly be announcing the appointment of a very exciting new chief executive to take over from the excellent Ian Hudson.

As it reaches its 20th anniversary, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is rightly recognised as a world leader in its field. It has remained so by continuously evolving its approach alongside breakthroughs in science, healthcare and the life sciences sector.

I know, however, that there is more to be done. That's why NICE is undertaking a review of its methods, in consultation with industry. And let me be clear, where the review demonstrates that substantive reform is

required, NICE will have unflinching political support to deliver it.

We are also introducing a new funding mandate for healthtech from 2020, combined with an increase in the number of NICE appraisals. This will make sure that the best new products make it to patients who need them, no matter where they live.

A co-ordinated and joined-up system

Finally, we need to improve and speed up the way the NHS adopts innovation.

There is little point in having a world-leading research infrastructure if those same products are not used and rapidly spread across the NHS.

Our response to the Accelerated Access Review made clear our ambition for NHS patients to be among the first in world to receive life-changing treatments.

This would be good for patients, good for the NHS and good for industry.

In the past year, we have made real progress.

We've launched NHSX, who are already working hard to develop more open data standards, improve procurement practices and ensure the NHS has the digital skills it needs for the future.

We've recruited Matthew Gould, the former British Ambassador to Israel, to head up NHSX, and use the negotiating skills he honed working on the Middle East peace process to bridge organisation divides within the NHS.

We have also brought together key government, NHS and industry partners to form the Accelerated Access Collaborative (AAC).

Many of you will have seen my recent announcement to expand the AAC. And you will be hearing from Dr Sam Roberts, the new Chief Executive, on her plans for the future, later this afternoon.

Now, the AAC may sound like just another bureaucratic acronym, but I believe that through acting as a single umbrella organisation across the UK health innovation eco-system, it will genuinely drive change in the NHS.

But how will this work in practice? The AAC will:

- create a system that works together to identify the best new innovations and signal the needs of patients and clinicians to industry. For example, HealthTech Connect identifies the best health technologies during development, so that the NHS is ready to make use of them as soon as they come to market
- develop a seamless and efficient testing and approvals process for new innovations, so that gaps and inconsistencies are removed as products move across the system

- support early and flexible engagement on commercial arrangements, to align innovation policy with trusts and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs)

Testing is particularly important for healthtech. By testing a product in a real-world setting, innovators can generate the evidence they need to convince commissioners to adopt it.

This is why we have committed to develop a globally leading testing infrastructure within the UK in both the Long-Term Plan and the life science sector deals.

The combination of a healthtech funding mandate and a globally leading testing infrastructure will ensure the best new innovations get into the NHS, and to patients, faster.

It is a big challenge – but one that we can deliver.

As well as improving the internal plumbing of the NHS, the AAC is also continuing to directly support the best new products.

You may have seen the recent media coverage on the increased NHS support to make pre-eclampsia tests more widely available.

This represents just one of the 7 high-performing technologies already receiving specialist, targeted support. Just these 7 innovations have the potential to improve the lives of half a million patients, and save the NHS up to £30 million.

And just last week NHS England also announced the latest tests, procedures and treatments to be supported with £19 million in funding through the Innovative Technology Programme (ITP).

Over 300,000 patients have already benefited from access to treatments through the programme and these exciting new technologies will benefit over 400,000 more.

A great example is Heartflow, a device used to treat coronary heart disease without invasive surgery, which is being supported by both the AAC and the ITP.

Not only does Heartflow save the NHS £214 per patient, but, more importantly, it puts patients back in control of their condition, providing peace of mind through improved diagnosis.

Fundamentally, both the Secretary of State and I are committed to a simple goal: supporting healthtech innovators to spread the use of the most exciting new products in the NHS.

Closing message

In closing, I want to leave you all with a simple message: both the Secretary of State and I are committed to supporting healthtech innovators, and using your products to improve the health and wellbeing of patients right across the country.

I am more confident than ever that together we are creating one of the most pro-innovation health innovation systems in the world.

An innovative ecosystem that ensures:

- clinicians have access to the best new innovations, which are tailored to meet their key healthcare needs
- innovators better understand these needs and have the support they need to demonstrate how their innovations can address them
- more patients have access to more innovations which offer them improved prevention, earlier diagnosis, and more targeted treatment

All that I ask is for your continued close partnership as we deliver this vision together.