

Speech: I believe in the power of technology to make lives better

I want to talk this morning about the future of healthcare.

And I want to talk about technology.

I am well known as a technology enthusiast – and not just because I have my own app.

Since I have been Health Secretary, I have put shoulder to the wheel to get out-of-date technology, which is no longer fit for purpose, like fax machines and pagers, out of the NHS – and get the best new technology in.

We may be making some progress – and I am determined to continue.

Today, I want to talk about why.

Why do I care about the best technology in healthcare?

Because I believe in the power of technology to make human lives better.

Why should anyone care about the best technology in healthcare? Because to care about technology is to care about people.

People. That's always been what all the tech, all the scientific developments and healthcare innovation is all about.

And there are some naysayers.

But Britain has always been on the cutting edge – driven by a desire to develop new ways to improve lives and save lives.

Vaccination, immunisation, IVF – pioneered by British scientists with a mission to save lives, improve lives, give the gift of life itself.

Yet all those vital technologies we take for granted now were once scary and unknown.

Take IVF – first conceived at the Royal Oldham Hospital.

It's become a routine medical practice within my lifetime, but not that long ago serious scientists were saying it couldn't be done, or shouldn't be done.

More than 8 million children have been born with the help of IVF.

Every one of us knows some of the millions of parents who have experienced the joy and miracle of parenthood that they wouldn't have otherwise known. I know some of those parents and I have seen the joy it brings.

All because of the genius of human ingenuity, and pursuit of innovation, in a

mission to make life better for people who couldn't conceive children on their own.

All because someone cared enough to do something about it.

It's my firm belief that robotics, personalised medicines, artificial Intelligence and genomic sequencing will all, in time, come to be considered a routine, everyday part of healthcare.

And yes, there are important ethical questions.

And yes, we must answer these.

And yes, we must take people with us.

But no, we must not stop the clock, and reject technology because it's too controversial or too hard.

I believe we must make the case for tech in a humane, compassionate, caring way.

Listening to people's fears, not dismissing them.

I believe in the innate and instinctive desire in all of us to care for those we love. And all this new health technology has the same simple quest to do just that: to help care for each other.

Helping to heal the nation, and we could probably all do with a little healing right now.

Because the future, the unknown, provokes strong emotions in people: excitement, curiosity, and of course fear.

Unchallenged, fear can triumph over reason, particularly when it comes to tech.

And from Malthus on, most of those apocalyptic, prophets of doom turn out be spectacularly wrong. And often not because the premise of the concern is wrong: Malthus was right to worry how we'd feed ourselves.

But wrong because they ignore the capacity of human ingenuity to shape technological development: to bend the power of science to human ends.

The naysayers, they say to me:

Stop worrying about technology: there's a shortage of doctors.

Or:

This technology isn't perfect – we shouldn't use it.

And the thing is, the premise of these accusations is true. We do need more doctors, and the technology isn't perfect.

But the response, to both of these challenges, is to make the technology better, not to reject it altogether, in a spirit of rational enquiry and scientific progress.

The Spectator is part of a fine, enlightenment, intellectual tradition that has promoted this way of thinking for centuries.

This is what the Spectator had to say in 1871, in a scathing piece attacking Gladstone's government for dismissing vaccination rather than encouraging it:

If vaccination were to be abandoned, the result would be that smallpox would become not an epidemic, but a pestilence, spreading infection far and wide, fatal in the majority of cases, inflicting permanent injuries on the survivors....

This is the teaching of medical science, and against this we are asked to put the 'conscientious belief' of a few people that medical science is either mistaken or dishonest.

It could almost have been written today.

And I love this example from the Spectator archives, a leader column from 2 July 1948, 3 days before the NHS was born:

There are too few doctors for the anticipated demand, there are far too few nurses, [the majority of dentists appear for the moment to be standing aloof from the scheme]....

But it is undoubtedly right to get the health service started. Whenever it was started it would be imperfect, and need to be amended and improved in the light of experience.... But the nation will soon possess the best medical service in the world.

Quite right.

Progress, by its nature, is never perfect. It's piecemeal, it's hard fought, it's not the easy promises of populism. The NHS didn't happen overnight with a click of the fingers to meet every need and fulfil every expectation – as some people would have you believe.

It took years of painstaking preparations, tortuous negotiations, work to drive it forward in government, first by Conservative and then Labour ministers.

Progress means we keep going, never settling, always aiming higher, always trying to make things better.

Diagnose, test, solve, repeat.

Testing hypothesis against objective fact, with an optimistic yet sceptical mind.

We should look to the great Canadian ice skater Wayne Gretzky for inspiration on this, because the secret of Gretzky's success was not going to where the puck is, but "where the puck is going".

And it's this spirit of continuous improvement I believe we need in the NHS today.

The NHS has always been at its best when it's looked to the future and embraced new technology.

Because of the decisions this Conservative government has taken – £34 billion extra a year, the longest and largest cash settlement in its history – the NHS can plan for the future with the confidence, and technology, that it needs.

So what's 2030 going to look like?

Well, it's probably not going to be flying cars and hoverboards – though after last week, who am I to predict the future?

But I think we can be pretty certain that the digital revolution that has transformed the way we shop, eat, bank, travel, read, watch, and even find love, is going to have arrived in our hospitals and GP surgeries.

Robotic surgery that's less invasive, faster and with fewer errors.

There's the game-changing potential of AI and genomics to predict which of us are susceptible to which illnesses, diagnose those already ill faster, and develop tailor-made treatments to get us back to health.

But it's not just about this cutting-edge technology. It's about getting the basics right.

You can file for divorce online – and a depressing 13 did on Christmas Day – yet not everywhere can you book a GP online.

Even using existing technology we can do so much more:

- new software to support remote monitoring of vulnerable and elderly people in their own homes
- video consultations – so more accessible and flexible appointments
- wearables that track vital signs and gently motivate us towards healthier lifestyles

Now, some may argue that we need to hold back this tide. That we should resist and fight back.

There's even a modern-day King Canute in the form of Jeremy Corbyn, who wants

to tax robots.

And I understand the impulses behind this view. It even turns out one of my ancestors was a leading, loom-smashing Luddite.

Yet, history has shown us time and again, it's better to shape change than to fight it.

It's better to be in favour of the future than live in fear of it.

And when I am out in hospitals and talking to NHS teams across the country, I also know that people – patients and staff – are enthusiastic to embrace technology.

They increasingly expect it to be there.

Technology is across all other parts of their lives.

They want to know why their mother can't get the best cancer treatment.

They want to know why their child has to wait longer to be diagnosed.

Why does their GP need to wait for a letter in the post from their specialist when every other part of their life is managed online?

So this is how we're going to do it: there's 3 parts to this approach:

First: prediction prevention.

We're going to use technology to help us identify those of us who are at higher risk of developing a disease, and then use existing medicine and advice to help prevent us from becoming ill in the first place.

Second: driving innovation across the NHS.

So we're introducing NHSX, a brand new, specialist bridge between the worlds of healthcare and technology.

It's going to work with industry and in-house teams to create a culture of innovation and experimentation within the NHS so proven, safe, tested existing technology spreads faster across the system – and we break up some of the silos that slow down progress.

We'll ensure we keep our first-ranked place at the forefront of the global debate around genomics so we can create an ethical framework to ensure this exciting new tech is developed responsibly.

Later this week, we will celebrate the brilliant 100,000 Genomes Project, which has harnessed whole genome sequencing to discover new diagnoses and better treatments for patients with rare diseases and cancer.

We're world-leaders, but we're not resting on our laurels.

We're going further with an ambitious target of sequencing one million whole

genomes.

It's not just about these 2 areas. Across the board the NHS needs a culture of seeking out and sucking in the best innovations on the planet.

We've got to stay at the cutting edge.

Third, and this is the most important for me: people.

The reason I care about tech is because I care about people.

We should never lose sight of that when we're talking about the latest gadgets and scientific breakthroughs.

The only reason tech and innovation matters is because people matter.

Getting it right in the NHS means your child, your partner, your parents, have a better chance of survival.

But there is another important – and often missed – benefit to good technology.

The best technology can also help doctors, the nurses, the paramedics and healthcare staff, who make the NHS what it is.

The right tech makes their lives easier. In the words of Eric Topol: it gives back the gift of time.

Because no robot is ever going to replicate human empathy.

No machine can replace what makes us human – the caring.

So the great big team that is the NHS – everyone in every part of the NHS – will need to be a part of this new era in NHS technology, and that involves training.

Because by embracing and shaping technology, we can harness progress to help people.

And I want to end on this point of progress.

Barack Obama said:

If you had to choose a moment in history to be born, and you did not know who you would be – whether you were going to be born into a wealthy family or a poor family, what country you'd be born in, whether you were going to be a man or a woman – if you have to choose blindly what moment you'd want to be born, you'd choose now.

Right now is the best time ever to be alive.

Just down the road from here was the Central London Recruiting Depot during

the First World War.

Like many of us, my great-grandfather served in that war.

He had served in the Boer War and in 1914 signed up, and spent the first 3 years training troops here in Blighty.

When we got short on men, he was sent out to France in March 1917, and in October he was injured when a shell exploded next to him and he was sent back to recuperate.

But we're made of determined stuff in my family.

In 4 months he was patched up, sent out again, and back into the trenches.

A few weeks later, he was shot through the shoulder.

He survived, but this time they thought they better give him an honourable discharge.

He cheated death twice in a year of front-line service.

The average life expectancy in the trenches was just 6 weeks, boys as young as 16 served on the frontline.

A century ago, if you managed to come through the war unscathed, you could expect to live to 50 if you were a man, or 55 if you were a woman.

An infection was the most common cause of death.

Tens of thousands of children didn't live to see their first birthday.

Now, thanks to antibiotics, immunisation, better public health and hygiene, a child born in the UK today has a good chance of living to 100.

And we led this change.

Nightingale, Fleming, Crick and the rest.

We must cherish and learn from this proud history, without ever being complacent or captured by the past.

And this is what I believe:

We led this change because of scientific progress.

We did it because technology was harnessed for human good.

We did it because we looked forward.

So, let's look forward now with confidence and optimism – as we have done before.

Let's embrace the innovations.

Let's believe in Britain.

And let's shape a better future for all.

[News story: Restrictions on adverts for food high in fat, sugar and salt: public asked for views](#)

A new [public consultation](#) asks people for their views on ways to reduce the number of adverts for foods high in fat, sugar and salt that children are exposed to.

The consultation sets out proposals to tighten advertising restrictions. The restrictions will limit children's exposure across the media they engage with most, as part of efforts to tackle childhood obesity.

The restrictions being considered include a 9pm watershed ban on TV, online streaming sites and social media. The restrictions have been designed with a view to encourage industry to develop healthier alternatives.

Data shows children are spending many hours each week watching television and an increasing amount of time online.

Adverts for sugary and fatty foods are more commonly shown than any other category. In 2017, it is estimated that children were exposed to more than 700 million online adverts for foods high in fat, sugar or salt and almost 3.6 billion TV adverts.

Exposure levels on TV have fallen significantly since restrictions around children's programmes were introduced 10 years ago, but there remains a significant amount of exposure.

Evidence suggests advertising can affect what and when children eat, both just after seeing an advert and in the longer term by shaping children's food preferences from a young age. This has the potential to affect their likelihood to become or remain overweight as adults.

The proposals would target foods that contribute most to children's intake of calories. The restrictions would not apply to everyday staples like butter, oil or meat.

As part of the consultation, the government will consider the impact that further advertising restrictions may have on business, particularly broadcasters.

Currently, one in 3 children are overweight or obese and the number of

severely obese children is on the rise. The proposals are part of a series of measures that will support the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) and help to halve childhood obesity by 2030.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We often talk about internet safety and how social media can affect our children's mental health and we are rightly taking action to address that. But what about their physical health? I want my children to grow up knowing what a balanced diet looks like – but their perception of what is healthy can get skewed when the vast majority of adverts they see on screen are for sugary snacks and fast food.

We know these adverts are shown on TV during prime family viewing time, and the evidence suggests this is increasingly being mirrored online too. With a scant 1% of adverts for fruit and vegetables, it's clear there is plenty of room to balance things out. We led the world with our soft drinks levy and today we are proposing to take similar world-first action – for the good of our children's health.

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary of State Jeremy Wright said:

We know that childhood obesity is one of the biggest health problems that our country faces. With children spending more time online it's vital that we look at all options to help us take action and improve the health of the nation.

The UK already has some of the toughest advertising restrictions in the world, but it is only right that we explore the impact that further action on TV and online advertising for products that are high in fat, salt or sugar will have on childhood obesity.

Steve Brine, Public Health Minister, said:

It is not right that our children are mainly exposed to adverts promoting foods high in fat, sugar and salt. Small amounts of excess calories every day over a long time causes obesity. But the evidence is clear that there is no one solution so our plan is about pulling together all the pieces of the jigsaw and tackling childhood obesity from all possible angles.

In fact, the NHS is already preparing to treat more and more children for the serious effects of extreme obesity in the future – so we surely have a duty to address the underlying cause. This isn't about banning everyday staples like butter and olive oil, it's about reducing children's exposure to those products that have

little nutritional value but that are part of a wider climate that is driving childhood obesity.

Press release: £30m Homes England loan brings more new homes to Basildon

- More than 760 new homes to be built across two sites
- 210 homes and 7,000 sq m of commercial space to be created at Laindon Place
- More than 550 new homes for Beechwood Village, including up to 110 affordable homes
- Majority of homes will be built offsite using modular construction techniques

The loan from the government's housing delivery agency will help to redevelop the Craylands Estate, renamed as Beechwood Village, and the Laindon Shopping Centre, which will become Laindon Place.

More than 550 new homes are being built at the Beechwood site, including up to 110 affordable homes, whilst 210 homes and over 7,000 sq m of commercial space will be developed at Laindon.

The funding will allow Swan Housing Association, who are working in partnership with Basildon Borough Council, to develop both schemes at the same time, enabling the final three phases of regeneration at Beechwood Village and new homes at Laindon shopping centre to be completed more quickly.

When completed, Laindon Place will include a new high street with shops, a supermarket, and a new health centre. The new homes to be built at Beechwood Village will be in addition to more than 400 homes, retail units and community centre completed in earlier phases.

Homes England has agreed the loan as part of its £290 million Estates Regeneration Fund, which offers finance to kick-start and accelerate the regeneration of estates.

Almost all the homes will be built off site at Swan's factory in Basildon, using pre-manufactured modular construction techniques.

Minister of State for Housing, Kit Malthouse MP, said:

"This funding not only supports more than 760 much-needed new homes, but further strengthens a community that residents can be proud of through new commercial and civic spaces for the people of Basildon.

“It’s all part of how this Government is supporting the delivery 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s, helping a new generation to realise the dream of home ownership.”

Sir Edward Lister, Chairman of Homes England said: “The Beechwood Village and Laindon Place regeneration projects are key priorities for Basildon and we’ve worked closely with Swan Housing Association to ensure the new homes local people need can become a reality.”

“Homes England strongly supports the use of modern methods of construction (MMC) as a means of delivering good quality homes at pace, so it’s great to see these methods being used to build better homes faster in Basildon.”

It’s anticipated that work at both sites will be completed by autumn 2024.

Geoff Pearce, Executive Director – Regeneration and Development of Swan Housing Association, said:

“Swan Housing Association and our long-term partner, Basildon Borough Council, are delighted to receive this funding boost from Homes England. It will enable us to build much needed high-quality homes, more quickly, at both Beechwood Village and Laindon Place. These homes will be built both using our state-of-the-art modular factory in Basildon and by traditional methods of construction. This partnership helps Swan towards our ambitious target of building an additional 10,000 homes by 2027 and Basildon towards its strategic growth goals for the Borough.”

Ends

For more information contact Sarah Foulkes, Communications Officer at Homes England. Tel: 0161 200 6130/ 07967 782 162 or email sarah.foulkes@homesengland.gov.uk

Press release: New pension scheme “could deliver improved returns for millions”

Millions of workers could eventually benefit from better retirement savings when a new type of pension scheme is introduced to the market, under pioneering proposals rubber-stamped by the Work and Pensions Secretary today.

Amber Rudd backed plans for the first Collective Defined Contribution (CDC) scheme in the UK after the pensions industry, insurers and other bodies welcomed the move proposed by Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Introducing a completely new pension scheme to the market is yet another revolutionary reform in this government's quest to transform the retirement saving culture in this country.

These pioneering proposals should deliver improved investment returns for workers and savers while cutting costs and red tape for British job creators.

The new type of pension is currently used in Denmark and the Netherlands – 2 countries widely recognised as having among the best pension systems in the world.

Any steps that result in better saving returns for workers are something to celebrate and I look forward to working with industry to enhance the prospects of millions of workers.

The benefits of CDCs are clear. Members get more certainty in their retirement, with regular pay-outs from their scheme. And unlike traditional final salary pension schemes, those pay-outs aren't affected if your employer goes under.

CDC pension schemes offer a regular retirement income by allowing group contributions to be pooled together and invested to give members of the scheme a higher final benefit level.

It also means much better long-term protections for members because risk is shared.

The new schemes are expected to appeal to companies who want to offer strong pensions provisions to employees without having to hang on to enormous pension liabilities.

The government has worked closely with Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union (CWU) to develop the proposals which went out to consultation in November.

Jon Millidge, Chief Risk and Governance Officer, Royal Mail, said:

This is very welcome progress. Royal Mail and CWU have been campaigning together to bring about this legislation, building a cross-party alliance of supporters in both Houses of Parliament as well as working with government.

We now look ahead to the next stage, and ultimately, delivering the UK's first CDC pension.

Terry Pullinger, CWU Deputy General Secretary Postal, said:

The response to the consultation on these proposals, and the degree of support from many key players, confirms our belief that the pensions industry is in genuine need of scheme innovation.

We are very proud and ready to be at the forefront of this historic moment which we believe will make a major contribution to offering future dignity and security in retirement for decent working people.

Many of the more than 70 contributors to the consultation on CDCs urged the government to make the new type of scheme widely available, including through multi-employer pensions and those run by commercial Master Trusts – potentially reaching millions of retirement savers.

The government has worked closely with Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union to develop the proposals which went out to consultation in November.

The consultation response, due to be published today (Monday 18 March), confirms primary legislation will be brought forward to introduce CDCs as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Protections will be built into the system to ensure fairness for both younger and older CDC pension scheme members, the consultation response asserts. Trustees of CDCs will be required to spell out the potential for fluctuations in pay-outs – depending on investment performance – to members at the outset.

The latest innovation builds on the success of automatic enrolment, which has brought more than 10 million people into workplace pensions since 2012, and the government's backing of industry to deliver pensions dashboards – capturing all someone's retirement savings information in one place.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5123

Follow DWP on:

[Press release: Quieter, smoother M6 in £7 million Carlisle upgrade](#)

The work includes resurfacing the main motorway carriageway, upgrading the roundabout at busy junction 44 and installing an improved noise barrier in the area.

The series of separate improvements is being carried out as one project to minimise disruption to drivers, similar to work completed along the A66 Eden Valley around Penrith last year.

Highways England project manager Jobert Fermilan said:

This work will ensure people using this part of Cumbria can continue to enjoy safe and smooth M6 journeys.

Delivering several different improvements in one package, as we did with the recent resurfacing work along the A66, will help minimise disruption and inconvenience to road users.

In detail the project – which starts on Monday 1 April and should be completed in August – involves:

- resurfacing the M6 northbound and southbound carriageways between junctions 44 and 45 north of Carlisle
- totally resurfacing the junction 44 roundabout and providing improved road markings to help guide drivers through the junction
- giving people living along the northbound carriageway near Todhills extra protection from noise by installing a brand new replacement acoustic barrier.

The work will be delivered during two distinct phases with the carriageway resurfacing and acoustic barrier improvements starting in April and requiring overnight lane closures and some speed restrictions past the roadworks. A second phase will follow – concentrating on the roundabout upgrade and requiring overnight closures of the junction over five weekends.

Residents living behind the current acoustic barrier along the southbound M6 near Todhills will benefit from a new fence with even better protection from traffic noise

Highways England has already discussed the work with Cumbria County Council and local businesses and will be publicising more details including any lane and junction closures ahead of and during the work.

Cllr Keith Little, Cumbria County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, said:

This is fantastic news for the M6, and for the communities and businesses that rely on this important route every day. Works to enhance road safety and the installation of a noise barrier will facilitate a better and safer experience for all road users and I'm delighted that such significant investment is being made in to the M6.

Anyone interested in the improvements and details of the road works can also find out more by attending one of several 'drop-in' events Highways England is staging in April 2019. You'll find dates times and locations, along with more information on the [M6 Carlisle North web page](#)

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.