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Media Release

New RUH service tackles the digital divide

Patients now have access to personalised support when using technology to help manage their health, following the launch of the Digital Inclusion team at the Royal United Hospitals (RUH), Bath NHS Foundation Trust.

It's estimated that 4% of UK adults are offline, with many millions more struggling to afford mobile and broadband access.¹ In addition, around 8.5million adults lack basic digital skills, which makes it hard for them to navigate everyday life. This includes accessing healthcare: a third of adults who are offline say it is difficult to interact with NHS services.²

The RUH has launched its Digital Inclusion service to improve access to and experiences of healthcare. Its dedicated patient access navigators provide bespoke, one-on-one support and encouragement to enable patients to feel more comfortable and confident using a range of digital health tools.

This might include helping someone use wearable technology to monitor a long-term health condition; access health apps or digital appointment letters, which provide more timely notifications and reminders of appointments than paper letters; use relevant websites and understand how to make the most of them; or access data or Wi-Fi.

Dr Reston Smith, RUH Deputy Chief Medical Officer, said: "Our long-term vision is that everyone in our community will have equitable access to and experiences of healthcare. However, for many reasons we know that millions of adults do not have the means or the skills to confidently use digital technology. This means there are growing inequalities in people's

¹ [What We Know About Digital Inclusion | Good Things Foundation](#)

² [Digital Nation | The UK's Digital Divide | Good Things Foundation](#)

experiences, with some finding it harder to access the NHS and tools that could enable them to better manage their health independently.

“I am proud that we have been able to set up our Digital Inclusion team to help change this. They will work closely with patients to give them the support and knowledge they need to use digital health tools outside of a hospital setting. This will also help improve our patients’ overall health and wellbeing, as well as giving them a more positive experience of healthcare in future.”

Now the team are inviting the public to meet them and find out more about using digital health technology as part of Get Online Week (14 – 20 October). They will be in the Atrium of the RUH on Tuesday 15 October from 11am – 1pm. The informal event will be run on a drop-in basis, and they welcome anyone who has questions or concerns about using technology to manage their health and wellbeing to come along to ask for advice and get support.

Veronica Kuperman, Health Inequalities Lead, said: “The digitisation of healthcare is advancing at fast speed, and we have the responsibility to ensure that nobody is left behind.

“Our Digital Inclusion team’s approachable patient access navigators understand that using technology can make some people feel nervous, but also know that with the right support it can really improve someone’s quality of life. The team will meet with the people we care for to find out what is important to them, whether that is using a health app or accessing Wi-Fi.

“Their friendly, personal support will ensure people leave hospital feeling more confident and comfortable using technology on their own.”

Outside of Get Online Week, patients can ask their care team to put in a referral to the Digital Inclusion team on their behalf. This can also be requested in advance via a care team, to coincide with an upcoming appointment.

Ends

Additional Information

While digital poverty can and does affect people of all ages and backgrounds, the groups most likely to be affected are those aged 65+, people with disabilities or a health condition, those not in employment, and people without formal qualifications (Good Things Foundation, April 2024). It's known that these groups are already at risk of having a less positive experience of healthcare than most.

Being able to confidently access technology does not just enable people to better manage their health. Research shows that most people are happier and feel more connected to friends and family after receiving digital inclusion support, as well as better off financially and more employable (Good Things Foundation, April 2024). All of this has a positive impact on someone's overall health and wellbeing.

Further reading and resources

- Good Things Foundation, September 2024. 'What the main UK datasets tell us'. <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/policy-and-research/research-and-evidence/research-2024/digital-inclusion-datasets#headline>
- Good Things Foundation, April 2024. 'Our Digital Nation'. <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/policy-and-research/research-and-evidence/research-2024/digital-nation>
- Lloyds Bank, 2023. '2023 Consumer Digital Index'. [231122-lloyds-consumer-digital-index-2023-report.pdf](https://www.lloydsbank.com/231122-lloyds-consumer-digital-index-2023-report.pdf)

Notes to Editor:

At the RUH we're proud to put people at the heart of what we do, striving to create an environment where everyone matters. Everyone means the people we care for, the people we work with and the people in our community.

We provide a wide range of services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

We also provide specialist services for rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME via the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases which we acquired in 2015.

In 2021, we acquired Sulis Hospital Bath, an independent hospital that provides care for both private and NHS patients. This has enabled us to provide more care for NHS patients, as well as continuing to provide private care to those who choose it. Any additional income earned through private care is reinvested in services for the benefit of the people we care for at both Sulis and the RUH.

Our new Dyson Cancer Centre brings together many of the RUH's cancer services under one roof to provide a cancer services hub for over 500,000 people in the South West. The centre includes the RUH's oncology, chemotherapy and radiotherapy services, a 22-bed inpatient ward, a dedicated pharmacy, research team and nuclear medicine and physics teams.

A key feature of the new centre is the Macmillan Wellbeing Hub. The three-storey hub provides a welcoming, non-clinical space designed around the needs of patients and their families. It also includes comfortable accommodation where relatives and loved ones can stay overnight.

We work closely with other health and care organisations as members of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board. We strive to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in our community by working together build one of the healthiest places to live and work.

We are rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk