

# Why the care sector must digitise its operations now to survive

The UK's care sector has entered a new period of difficulty. Care providers have been trying to serve a growing population and financial support struggles to match it. The pandemic exacted a heavy toll on the country's fiscal reserves and now the government must find ways to refill them, often through budget cuts and bill cap delays. At the same time, the workforce is shrinking for the first time in 10 years, which is raising the cost for companies to provide the same standard of care.

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These struggles have revealed an *inefficiency at the heart of the UK's care sector*. Although overall funding and worker availability might be outside their control, many companies still rely on outdated and sometimes purely paper-based methods to collect, organise, and access information relating to care recipients. These methods might once have suited the job, but it's now clear that they're causing problems across the companies that use them.

# Tackling ineffective methods

These out-of-date processes firstly increase the strain on on-the-ground care professionals themselves. With long lists of care recipients who they need to attend to during shifts, many care professionals are losing valuable time hand writing notes and visitation logs, which naturally takes them away from being able to provide higher quality care.

By embracing digital records, care providers would be able to improve their care professionals productivity, while also maintaining a high level of care. Our data shows that care providers can manage 35% more tasks after using our digital platform for only one year. Instead of using a pen and paper, care professionals use their phones or tablets to collect records using templated forms. This improves their working conditions by alleviating the administrative burden they bear and allows care professionals to spend more time with their care recipients.

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## Accelerating time-consuming activities

Back at head office, the paper-based records are often organised in legacy filing systems or disorganised computer networks. This, again, drains time from the companies providing care. If there is a key concern that needs to be addressed, it could take days before the file is found. Employees must email files around while navigating complex data protection laws. All of those processes increase care providers' response times and the relative financial burden.

Digital records would help staff accelerate the collection and organisation of recipient data, which in turn would allow care professionals to focus on the work that matters – caring for the elderly. For example, the longer our care partners are with us, the greater efficiencies and responsiveness we see in the care they provide. The number of alerts that took over 72 hours to resolve when first joining birdie fell by over 50% after being on the platform for 12

months.

This digital filing process also helps more broadly with preparations for an audit and the audit itself by streamlining a time consuming process , as well as the Care Quality Commission rating, as it makes it easy for care providers to provide evidence of their quality and have a better picture of what they need to do to improve and maintain a high rating.

## Future proofing care

One of the biggest issues of the current paper-based system is that it forces care providers to operate in a reactive way. Care providers have a wealth of care recipient information in their possession but the filing system makes it extremely difficult to quickly extract insight and act. The inefficient processes allow the use of this information only at the most basic level, meaning care professionals can only get to the most critical of care recipients alerts due to the time restraints. Equipped well, care providers could focus all their efforts on proactive care.

Digital records of recipients can provide more data relating to their health and trends that can easily be learned from. Systems are being developed that allow the data to be integrated with intelligent monitoring systems that automate the data collection process. When fully rolled out, these systems can notify a GP when the care recipient suffers from certain symptoms, like going to the toilet more frequently than usual.

We recently partnered with Fosse Healthcare on a study where we were able to use intelligent monitoring systems that allowed care professionals to track and report early warning signs of health risks. In one example, we were able to discover UTI cases early before they develop into something more serious. Over time, these digital platforms can improve with age as care providers collect more and more data, which ultimately gives care providers a better quality outcome for their care recipients, helping them grow.

Current challenges facing the care sector might seem daunting to many care providers. But there are steps that companies can take to ease the strain. Thanks to the latest technology developments, capable of collecting and analysing data to form predictions around a person's ever changing care needs, preventive healthcare will lead to considerable savings and significantly improve population health, while helping to keep the care industry afloat during this period of austerity.

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