



SJOG's Approach to Digital Literacy

SJOG Hospitaller Services UK:

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Introduction

Digital literacy is a fundamental skill to live in today's technologically driven world. At SJOG we want to make sure colleagues feel comfortable embracing new digital tools that make their job and everyday tasks better.

This paper explores what digital literacy means, why is it important, what some of the challenges in the health and care sector, and how we are trying to solve them through a digital strategy our Digital Library.

The Digital Library is an initiative to support colleagues in their learning process and provides access to devices that can help them develop their digital skills. Additionally, we will discuss resources and programmes that are in place for colleagues to learn and embrace the digital sphere.

What is digital literacy?

Digital literacy can be defined as the ability to use digital tools to solve problems, enhance communication, produce innovative projects and prepare for the challenges of an increasingly digital world. Although, there is not a single universally accepted definition of digital literacy, most agree that digital literacy goes beyond the mere ability to operate a computer or a particular technological tool. Paul Gilster, a pioneer in the use of the term digital literacy, wrote in 1997 that: "digital literacy is about mastering ideas, not keystrokes."

Digital inclusion is about people having the right access, skills, motivation and trust to go online with confidence (Gov UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport). As new technologies will constantly emerge the focus on digital literacy needs to be as much about attitudes as it is about skills.

Why is it important for the health and care sector?

Digital skills are vital for both individuals and the economy. The UK is in the midst of the 4th Industrial Revolution and to thrive and reap the benefits of digitalisation and new technologies, organisations need a workforce that is digitally literate (The Consultancy, 2021). This means

ensuring the workforce and those in training are skilled, confident and better equipped to work in a digital environment. (Health Education England and NHS England).

The use of technology is becoming more prevalent and critical to delivering safe, effective and personalised health and care services; therefore digital capabilities are integral to this process. With the emergence of Technology Enabled Care (TEC), students, academics, patients and everyone working in the health and social care sector must become fully competent, confident and capable with the use of technology. (NHS England, no date)

The benefits of digitalisation are manifold: from ensuring that accurate care records and results reach the right people in time, to helping colleagues feel comfortable and equipped to operate in a digital workplace. A report compiled by the Royal College of Nursing in 2018 talks about how the profession could be transformed by data, information, knowledge and technology. Integration of this tools could offer:

Better outcomes for patients - Digital tools have the potential to improve services for those receiving care, leading to better patient-centred experiences and health and wellbeing outcomes.

Better experiences for colleagues - The working lives of health and care colleagues could be improved by technology, enabling people to feel increased empowerment and satisfaction in their roles.

More efficient ways of working - Care could be delivered more efficiently, and a digitally enabled health service could release time for clinicians and healthcare workers to devote time to the people and communities who require their services.

The need for digital transformation in the sector has become more evident after the Covid-19 pandemic. Many organisations have already taken a big step towards digitalisation after evaluating the lessons from the pandemic, refining their plans, and formulating new strategies to move on to more efficient and future-proofed provision of services. For some organisations though, there remains a sense of venturing into the unknown.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is starting to put a lens on digital technologies. People's expectations about care has changed as services are powered and supported through new technology, changing the way care is received too. The growth of artificial intelligence, advances in data analytics, and the increase in mobile communication, all point to a future of care built on a dynamic partnership between health and care services and the people who use them.

Organisations providing care need to understand where digital services can meet people's needs to improve their outcomes. For this reason, the CQC is also making changes to the way they regulate services to be more relevant and increase positive outcomes for everyone. (Care Quality Commission-CQC, 2022)

Their strategy includes:

- Encouraging and championing innovation and technology-enabled services that benefit people and where the innovation results in more effective and efficient services.
- Encourage services to try new ways to deliver safe, high-quality care. Aiming to support their efforts to innovate through clear advice and guidance.
- Understanding and keeping pace with changes, both in new technology and new ways to deliver care. Work in partnership with services and other stakeholders to develop a coordinated, effective, and proportionate approach to regulating new innovations and technology. When doing this, consider where the use of new technology to deliver care might not suit some people, and what services need to do to make sure that nobody is disadvantaged.
- Encouraging services to play an active part in research to improve care for all, foster innovation and enhance people's experiences of care. Research can help improve the quality of care, and people often value the opportunity to participate in research, whether clinical trials or other studies.
- Building digital platforms that will better integrate the data CQC holds, which will enable to interpret data in a more consistent way. Using innovative analysis, artificial intelligence and data science techniques proactively to support robust and proportionate decision-making, based on the best information available. (Care Quality Commission-CQC, 2022)

Challenges

As we mentioned previously technology has transcended and transformed the UK health and social care sector, for this reason there has been significant changes in how health and social care professionals carry out their everyday tasks and interact with patients and clients. To keep up with and use of technology efficiently, workers need to constantly update and refresh their digital literacy knowledge and skills.

However, a move to full digital literacy is impeded by a lack of digital readiness throughout the healthcare system and more general barriers stopping people from becoming more digitally skilful. (University of Sunderland, 2021)

Some of the barriers affecting digital literacy are:

- Digital exclusion.
- Lack of motivation or perceived need for technology.
- Lack of trust in digital technologies and the internet (for example, fear of fraud).
- Lack of support with learning digital skills.
- Lack of access to the required devices and internet connectivity. (UK Parliament, 2021)

According to a recent research by Skills for Care, social care organisations may not be effectively utilising the digital skills of their colleagues within the workplace or making the best use of the available technologies.

Barriers specifically affecting the health and social care sector which hinder uptake and progression are:

- Inadequate technology and IT systems. NHS colleagues, for example, rely on pre-existing technology which is already unfit for purpose. Causing issues for even those tasks which should be relatively straightforward, such as sharing electronic health records.
- Inefficient use or access to devices. While 74% of colleagues have a personal smartphone, only 20% use the applications available on their personal phone for work purposes. 45% have a tablet device at home compared with only 8% having a work tablet. Also, some colleagues members do not have access to this technology in the remote and community settings in which they work.
- Organisational structures and contexts which do not support colleagues to deliver digitally enabled health and social care services.
- Undercolleaguesing. Colleagues who are already struggling to deliver patient care are not well-placed to engage with, and prioritise learning of, new technologies.
- Underfunding by the Department of Health and Social Care.
- Prevalent lack of digital literacy and lack of education around informatics. In the case of many care workers who began careers before the advent of digital technology this can make e-learning tools in themselves a barrier. (University of Sunderland, 2021)

SJOG's approach to digital literacy

SJOG understands the importance of supporting colleagues in developing their digital skills. Apart from responding to the global and local environment, the charity has a focus on professional development of colleague and enhancing their skills for the future.

Colleagues at SJOG are diverse. People come from different backgrounds and professions. It is vital that everyone feels included and up to date when it comes to using technology regardless of their own journey and position.

At SJOG our mission is to meet need where we find it. Many of the people supported are communities who are more likely to be digitally excluded than others. These are:

- Older people
- People in lower income groups
- People without a job
- People in social housing
- People with disabilities
- People with fewer educational qualifications excluded left school before 16
- People living in rural areas
- Homeless people
- People whose first language is not English (NHS England, 2023)

Therefore, having a capable workforce with digital literacy skills and the proper tools can cascade into supporting those who have less opportunities to enhance their digital skills in addition to providing care.

Digital library

SJOG provides learning and training opportunities for colleagues. The most recent initiative focused on helping colleagues with their digital skills is The Digital Library. (See diagram attached)

This initiative consists of a suite of 16 tablets available for people to borrow for a period of three weeks. The tablets come preloaded with access to digital literacy learning tools such as Learn My Way, a free e-learning website with resources and step by step guides to improve digital skills. The courses range from using a computer, to more complex tasks like completing a purchase online.

We are to begin an evaluation of the benefit and develop the initiative from this. Nevertheless, is expected that this project makes a difference to colleagues by helping them overcome some of the barriers to digital literacy mentioned. For example, providing access to devices for those who don't have one, encouraging people to learn and embrace the fear of using new technologies by motivating colleagues to integrate them in their job and daily tasks, and lastly showing them that SJOG is committed to support their learning process regardless of there level. There is still work to be done for The Digital Library to reach the expected impact but is a first step to a digital literacy strategy that will involve the people working at SJOG.

In addition to the Digital Library, SJOG has also introduced other initiatives to help colleagues to get comfortable in the digital world. Use of social media has been encouraged with an internal social media platform where colleagues can put into practice their communication skills and interaction online. This was supported with social media training offered by an external communications agency.

Digital transformation strategy

SJOG's Digital Transformation Strategy was developed utilising the underpinning principles of the technology acceptance model (TAM: Davis, 1989) and how our current methods of digital communication and recording met the views and abilities of our team members. The strategy forms part of a wider strategic need to be responsive to the changing culture and approach of how we are regulated and was a direct reflection of the 'Smarter Regulation' key component of the new CQC Strategy, 2021. We are aware all providers must be digital and use a digital evidence platform by the end of 2023.

To ensure the fidelity of the strategy SJOG has evaluated its current recording and reporting mechanisms and in order to tailor these for maximum productivity at each governance level, we have reviewed a number of our systems and requested support to change these with our partners. Internally we are developing SJOG Quick Skills which are short bitesize clips to promote learning and understanding of our digital platforms and usability of our software.

As we move through the development phases of our external recording and reporting platforms, we are ensuring a staged approach so that each phase follows the plan, do, study, act approach which will embed reflective learning and ongoing development and enhance our technology readiness for the future.

Further developments in this space

SJOG's digital transformation is an ongoing process. The organisation could benefit from embedding other resources available to support a digital strategy. For instance, the NHS England has developed a TECS Programme focussed on delivering a set of practical tools and resources to address the demand from health and social care professionals for support on this topic. The program also seeks to give guidance on how to commission, procure, implement and evaluate so as to maximise the value of innovative or digital solutions and services (NHS England, no date). Further resources include Digital Champions Programme Toolkit, a Digital Literacy Self-Assessment Diagnostic Tool – underpinned by the Health and Care Digital Capabilities Framework – and other resources to help identify knowledge gaps and up-skill colleagues members. (University of Sunderland, 2021)

Final thoughts

We have begun the journey in improving digital literacy. It takes time to plan and implement and people still need walking alongside to feel supported in the process. Our ongoing plans, linked to our digital transformation strategy, helps embed our efforts to uplift our colleagues' skills and in so do continue to improve the quality, variety and success of our care and support.

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