

The NHS is vital to the UK, pathology is vital to the NHS, and IT is vital to both

Michael Simpson, president and chief executive of Clinisys, says pathology and innovation have gone together for 75-years and will continue to do so.

Clinisys is incredibly proud to be a critical supplier to the health service. We're not quite as old as the NHS; it has turned 75 this year and we turn 40. But over those four decades, we have formed a phenomenal partnership with pathology providers and the clinicians that depend on them.

Just look at how NHS pathology has changed over the past 15-years. In 2008, Lord Carter of Coles published the first of two reports arguing there was too much variability in pathology services, and efficiency and quality could be improved with consolidation.

Since then, 27 pathology networks have been formed across England, and the majority are using our solutions to streamline their operations and digitise the process of ordering tests and reporting results. Today, we can send information back and forth in seconds that used to require hours of printing, posting, driving, and telephone chasing, and we're incredibly proud of that.

Covid-19 changed the landscape, and innovation will change it further

Even so, Covid-19 was a turning point. The pandemic got pathology out of the basement. It made policy makers and hospital managers and patients aware of just how much testing matters. Something like 80% of the decisions that a physician makes about us are based on the results of a test.

It also showed the potential of home testing. Before Covid-19 arrived, few of us thought the public would be able to do their own lateral flow tests; but they did, and they got it right most of the time. So, I think the challenge now is to expand on that.

We'll need to make sure there's clarity about why home tests and point of care tests are being done, and maintain quality, and find a way to write the results back to the patient record so clinicians can be confident about acting on them.

But if we can do all that, we can reduce some of the pressure on our laboratories, so they can focus on where their expertise adds value. Meantime, there's more innovation coming to those labs, in the form of automation and digital pathology and artificial intelligence; or what we call augmented intelligence.

A lot of testing involves looking down a microscope for hours, counting cells. It's tedious and can be error prone, and the great thing is that AI can do it in seconds. AI is not going to be making clinical decisions, but it is going to be supporting clinical decision making, and it's coming down the road very fast.

Environmental test data can deliver a healthier, safer future

The NHS is also looking to shift its focus from treatment to prevention and public health. Over the past couple of years, Clinisys has made a huge investment in systems that support laboratories that carry out public health surveillance.

That's because we recognise that a lot of sickness starts with the food that communities eat, and the water they drink, and the air they breathe. The challenge here will be to get these new

sources of information to the integrated care systems, or the GPs, or the individuals, who can act on it.

However, the NHS has two huge advantages over some of the other healthcare systems in which we operate, globally. The first is that it's an integrated, single payer system, and the second is the NHS Data Spine, which moves data from one point to another.

In fact, I think the NHS may be uniquely positioned to tackle environmental healthcare, and to start making the world a healthier and safer place. Wouldn't that be a great ambition for its next three quarters of a century?