EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Information for Health\(^1\) is the NHS strategy for information, published in September 1998 and updated in Building the Information Core\(^2\). Both these initiatives support the objectives of the Government’s plans for the modernisation of public services and underpin the delivery of the NHS Plan\(^3\).

IM&T (Information Management and Technology), or Informatics as it is increasingly becoming known, is now a top priority for NHS Chief Executives and their boards. This is especially relevant as the NHS moves into a period of restructuring, as set out in Shifting the Balance of Power\(^4\) which describes how the focus of service provision is to be based on a smaller number of Strategic Health Authorities (StHAs), each with the responsibility for developing strategy and performance managing Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), NHS Trusts and Workforce Development Confederations.

The new structure emphasises the need for cooperative working between all organisations that comprise the local health community, for openness and the interchange of quality information, for adequate governance (both corporate and technical) across local care networks, whilst retaining accountability within those organisations.

It is the responsibility of each organisation, and therefore each NHS board, to ensure that its approach to implementing the technology and systems to support staff in the delivery of high quality patient care is sound. Boards will be held to account if they are unable to deliver timely and high quality information, whether it is for the benefit of an individual patient or for organisational performance.

A number of key questions in respect of information and IT issues are suggested as being appropriate for NHS Board members to raise and discuss with their colleagues, namely:

(i) **What is our strategy for supporting integrated health and social care with information and IT?**
(ii) **Does our strategy integrate appropriately, both locally and nationally?**
(iii) **Do our commissioning and other funding arrangements take adequate account of the need for sustained IM&T investment to improve the quality of services?**
(iv) **Are we investing appropriately, both in the technical infrastructure and in the training and facilitation needed to make it useful?**
(v) **How do we ensure that the right resources are allocated to information and IT, and how will we know that they are used wisely?**
(vi) **What are the policies and procedures for dealing with the risks associated with IM&T?**
(vii) **How does our organisation learn from successes and failures in the use of information and IT, whether these are internal to our organisation or occur elsewhere?**

It is suggested that NHS board members, particularly non-executive Directors, ensure they are satisfied that adequate answers can be provided to each of these questions:

- As a means of assessing the local status of information and IT
- To obtain a clearer understanding of the potential for using IM&T to improve the commissioning and provision of health care
- To promote more integrated health care through the application of IM&T
- To ensure resources are used wisely and effectively on projects conducted to professional standards
FOREWORD

Information, with its associated technology, is one of the most important resources in the National Health Service. It is also one of the least well understood. Inevitably, the drive for improved patient care is linked to better value from information, and the efficient management of information and its supporting technology is an important part of the responsibility of those accountable for public funds.

In 1998, consultation between the NHS Executive, the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission, and the British Computer Society identified a need to provide advisory guidance to help NHS Trust and Health Authority boards manage their responsibility for Information Management and Technology. A Working Group was convened, comprising representatives from each organisation and charged with producing guidance on good practice to be a ready source of regular reference. The original publication, managed by the NHS Information Authority’s Ways of Working with Information Programme, was then published.

Following a number of significant developments since the original document was published, including the publication of the NHS Plan, updates to the NHS national strategy for information and the introduction of new organisational structures and responsibilities in local health communities, the NHS Information Authority, in collaboration with a range of other stakeholders, has determined that the guidance should be updated to reflect these developments.

The principles of corporate and information technology governance contained in the original guidance document continue to apply, but even more so as the NHS becomes increasingly dependent upon good information and systems to deliver quality patient care.

It is now with great pleasure that together we commend this revised and updated document to you, which we again hope to review from time to time. We trust that it will help you carry out the demanding task of managing efficiently your information and its supporting technology.

May 2002

John Carrington
Master of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists

Sir John Bourn KCB
Comptroller and Auditor General

Sir Andrew Foster
Controller, Audit Commission

Professor Alastair Bellingham
Chair, NHS Information Authority

Sir William Wells
NHS Appointments Commissioner

Professor Sir John Pattison
Director of Research, Analysis & Information, Department of Health

Geoff McMullen
President, British Computer Society

Want to know more
Please contact: Information Hotline
Tel: 08453 66 00 66
e-mail: information@nhsia.nhs.uk
nww.nhsia.nhs.uk
www.nhsia.nhs.uk

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