

Thoughts on Citizen Empowerment and Person-centred Care

George Crooks

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Everywhere you look in the medical literature at the moment you find references to citizen empowerment and person-centred care. I suspect that these phrases are often included because there is an expectation by the author that they must be included! However, the real challenge is how do you turn these simple words into reality. Particularly at a time when health and care services are under significant pressure from rising demand and constrained finances. Over the past couple of years there appears to be a grudging realisation that the “new kid on the block” of technology enabled care may actually have a real part to play in the development of sustainable health and care services. Consumer electronic companies have understood for many years that the creation of environments which not only meets their customers expectations but also meets their needs by making their interactions hassle free and over time more personalised makes for a happy and loyal customer. Why are we in the health and care system so slow to learn?

A cynic would say that up until four or five years ago the vast majority of spend within the NHS across the UK on what has been known as eHealth was focussed on systems designed to benefit the health organisations or the people that work in them, with the patient being the passive beneficiary. Things are slowly changing and there is a move towards the development of citizen facing digital tools and services. This must be supported and encouraged by empowering our population to make better informed life choices, by supporting them through the provision of readily accessible health information and advice. They at least stand a chance to have their voice heard and to be more actively involved with their health and care professionals in making decisions.

The door is opening and we all have a responsibility to keep pushing because technology, if well designed and appropriately used can help us make a giant step forward in securing the ideal of empowered citizens and person-centred care.