

White Paper

Saving Time through Digital Processes in Domiciliary Care

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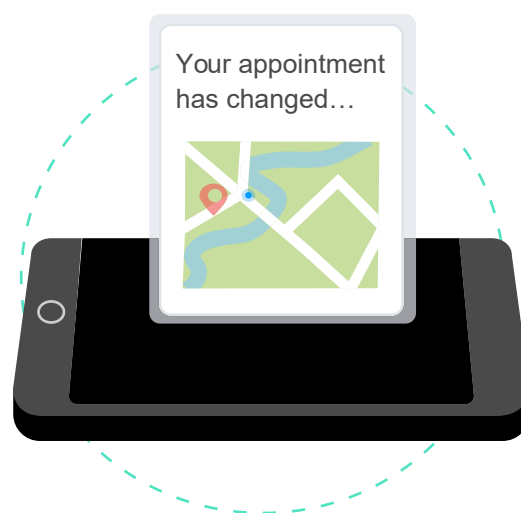
Introduction

It's almost impossible to attend an event for the domiciliary care industry without hearing something about technology solutions to improve care delivery and the management of care. It sometimes feels like every solution provider is claiming theirs is the solution you need. But what are the options, which processes really do save time and what's coming next?

In its official advice on [using technology in care](#), the CQC notes that:

“Technology can support staff to make their processes more efficient. This means that their time isn't taken up by administrative work.”

This quote is at the heart of what we explore in this white paper. We will look at how the efficiency of managing and delivering domiciliary care is now being revolutionised by digital processes. And we will explore how these processes fit against a backdrop of changing pressures in the sector and workforce preferences.



We also look ahead to how emerging trends are likely to create time savings through digital processes in the future, and how you can be ready to capitalise on these through choices you make today.

After reading this white paper, you should have a deeper understanding of the opportunities to refine your existing processes to save time and improve workforce efficiency.

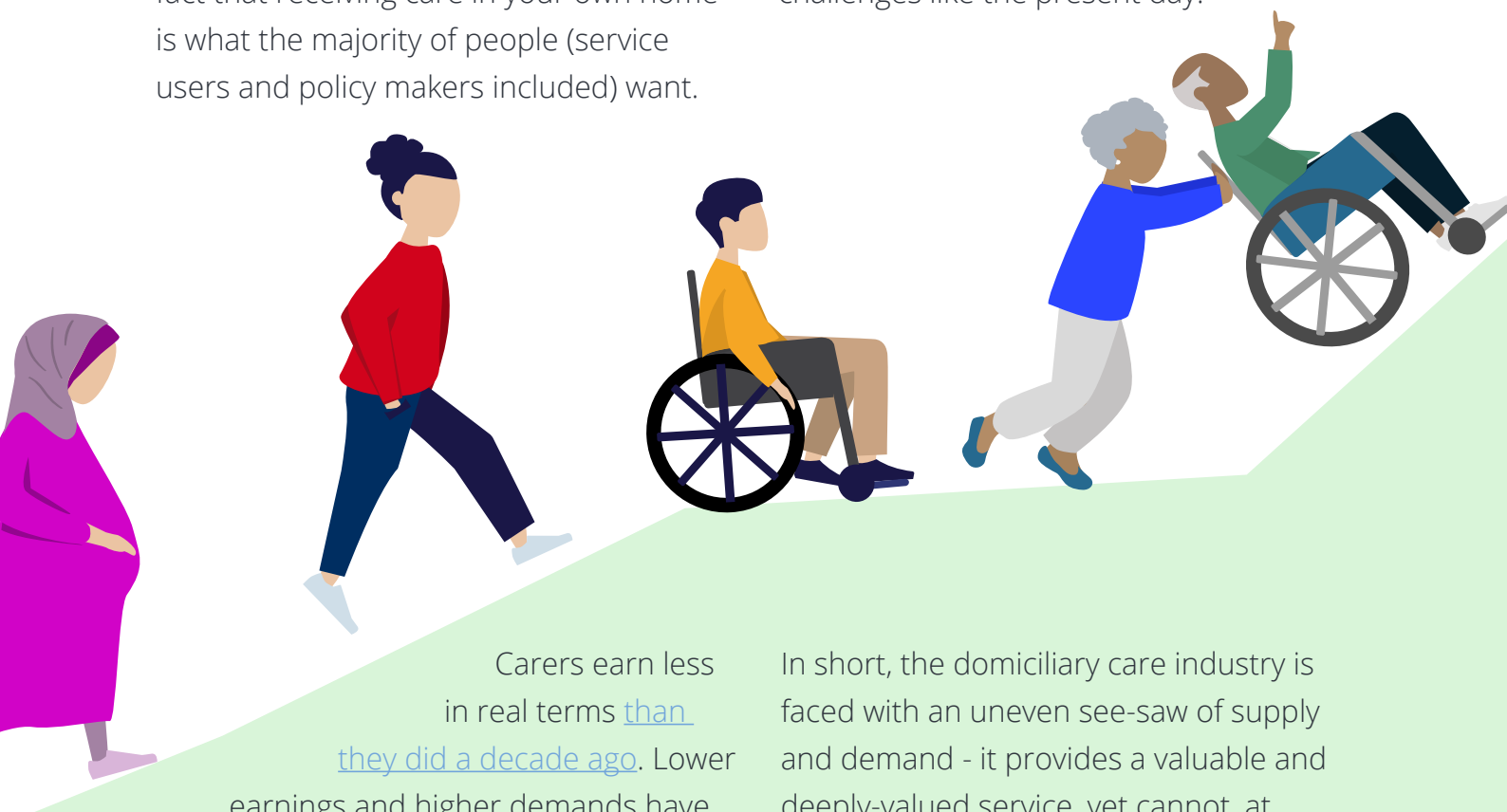
The Challenges of Domiciliary Care

We live in challenging times for care providers. On the one hand, there is a decline in local authority funding for care. On the other hand there are higher numbers of individuals needing care than ever before. As ever, care providers are being asked to do more with less

As you may well be aware, demand for domiciliary care is likely to become even greater. This isn't just the result of demographic trends - it's a result of the fact that receiving care in your own home is what the majority of people (service users and policy makers included) want.

This is backed up by recent research, indicating clear advantages of domiciliary care over residential care, from both a cost and quality of life perspective, and echoed by calls from the Health Secretary Matt Hancock for a greater percentage of people to receive care in their own homes.

As if the challenge of meeting rising demand wasn't enough on its own, there is an increasing shortfall in recruitment of carers. The sector has never faced staffing challenges like the present day.



Carers earn less in real terms [than they did a decade ago](#). Lower earnings and higher demands have resulted in a drop in people entering the care profession, as well as an increase in those leaving roles.

In short, the domiciliary care industry is faced with an uneven see-saw of supply and demand - it provides a valuable and deeply-valued service, yet cannot, at present, fulfil its resource requirements. Something has to change.



Why Paper-Based Processes need to go

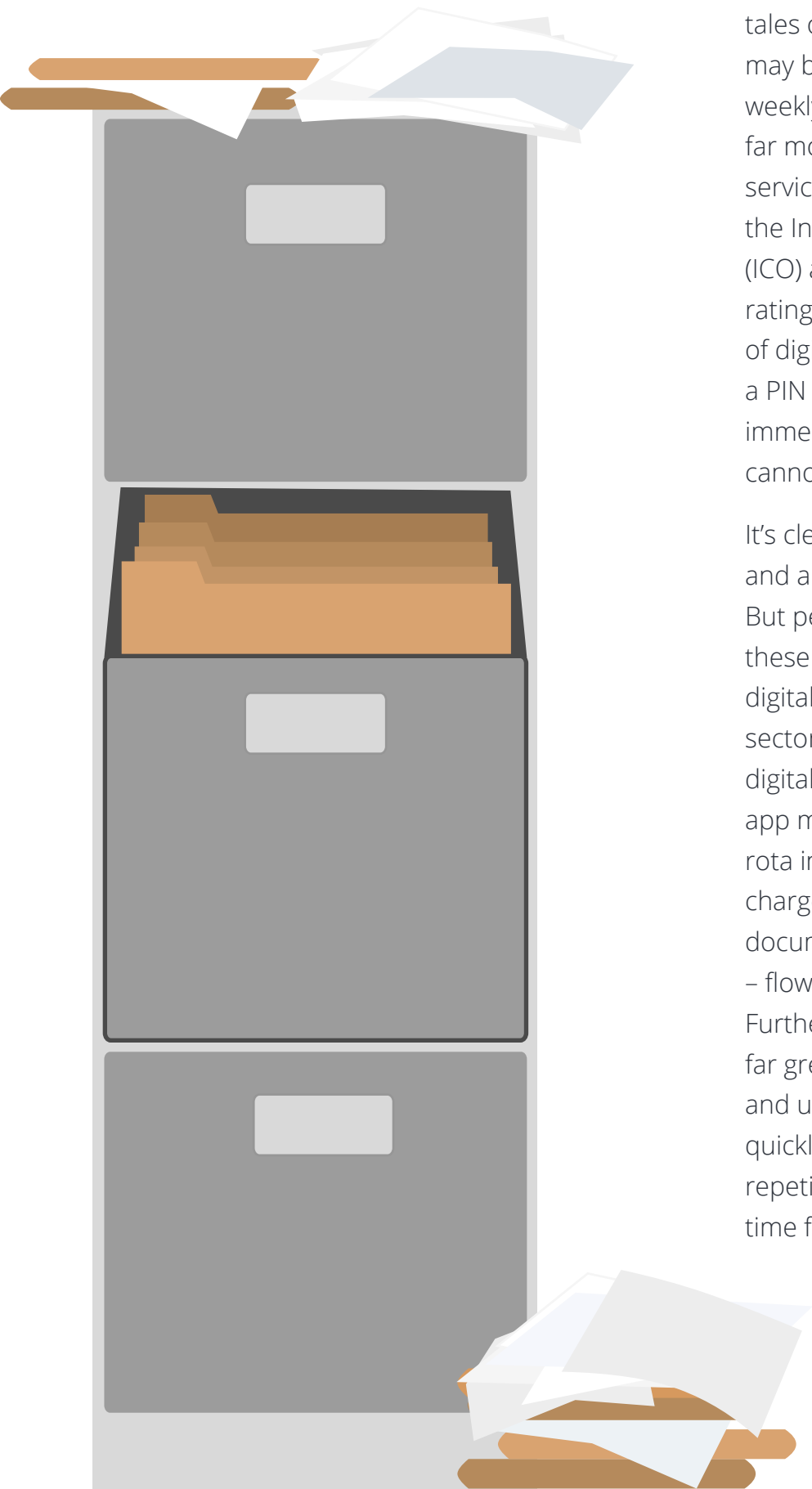
CQC recommendations now include reference to the use of technology in care, and the government's vision for care takes an increasingly pro-digital tone. There are plenty of good reasons for this.

First, in a GDPR-compliant workplace, it's important to be able to control, track, update and remove personal data in ways that place impossible demands on paper-based systems. The accountability of who

made which changes and when in a paper-based system would effectively double the paper-based workload by itself. The GDPR is not optional and applies just as much to data in paper format as it does to that which is held electronically.

Beyond the practicalities of complying with CQC requirements and legislation such as the GDPR, digital processes are replacing paper to deliver

efficiencies never before possible. Consider the time traditionally spent printing, filing and searching for documents. This is slashed when you move to digital. Storage challenges become a matter of hard disk size or, more commonly, irrelevant as data is stored in the cloud with service providers who offer unlimited storage capacity on highly-secure and regularly backed-up systems.



On that note, let us also consider that other familiar characteristic of paper: its susceptibility to damage and loss. Earnest tales of dogs eating homework books may be one thing, but a carer losing their weekly rota or a service user's file can pose far more serious consequences, to your service user's safety, your oversight from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and potentially your agency's CQC rating. Yet even the most rudimentary of digital processes tend to sit behind a PIN code or a password, providing an immediate level of protection that paper cannot offer.

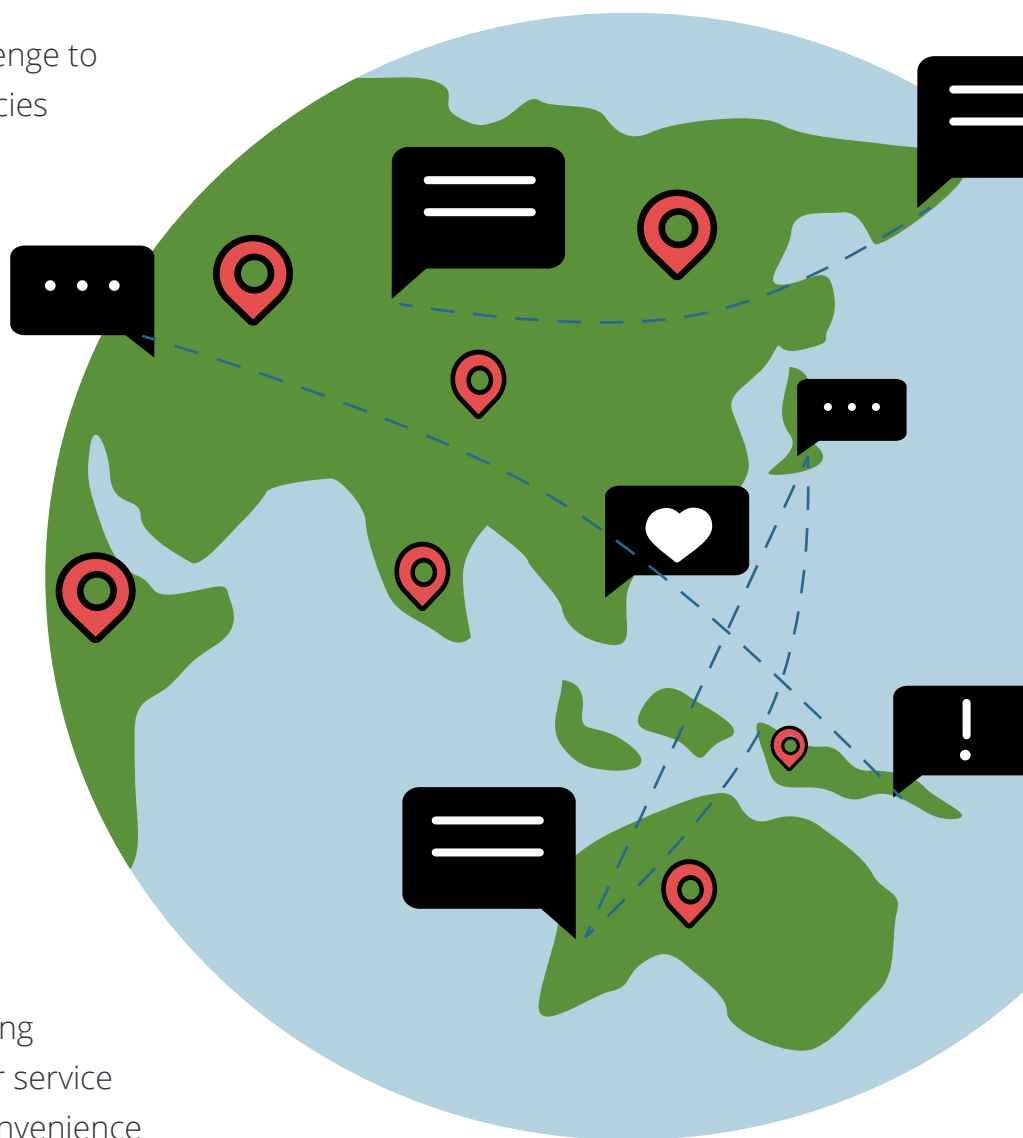
It's clear, then, that paper is inefficient and a higher risk than digital alternatives. But perhaps even more compelling than these reasons, and the main reason digital is replacing paper outside the sector, is the dynamic capabilities of the digital realm. Accessing a care rota via an app means you'll always have the latest rota information. If a name, location or charge rate needs to change across all documents, it's just one change to make – flowing automatically across everything. Furthermore, working digitally, you have a far greater connection between systems and users – changes can be communicated quickly, issues spotted sooner, and repetitive tasks automated to free up more time for carers to deliver care.

It's a Digital World

We spend more hours attached to screens than ever before – whether our phones, monitors or televisions. As a result, we are, on a whole, more comfortable with communications sent digitally and accessing information from digital platforms, such as our phones.

In light of the growing challenge to recruit new care staff, agencies need to do more to appeal to the younger generation entering the workplace. It's no secret that millennials entering the workplace consistently favour electronic processes over paper. Offering app-based interfaces and minimising manual paper-based processes will encourage younger workers to apply and stay with your agency for longer.

It's not just your staff who will be expecting screens to replace clipboards and ring binder files. Families of your service users will appreciate the convenience of electronic invoices and the accessibility of digital care portals. Digital processes aren't just something which will be gladly received: they'll be expected.



Digital Records



Carer records and reminders

Carers each have an associated set of records, from the latest training certificates to DBS or other background checks. If certain records are only valid for a short amount of time (e.g. training certificates), digital systems can store these documents with an attached schedule of reminders to trigger ahead of expiry.



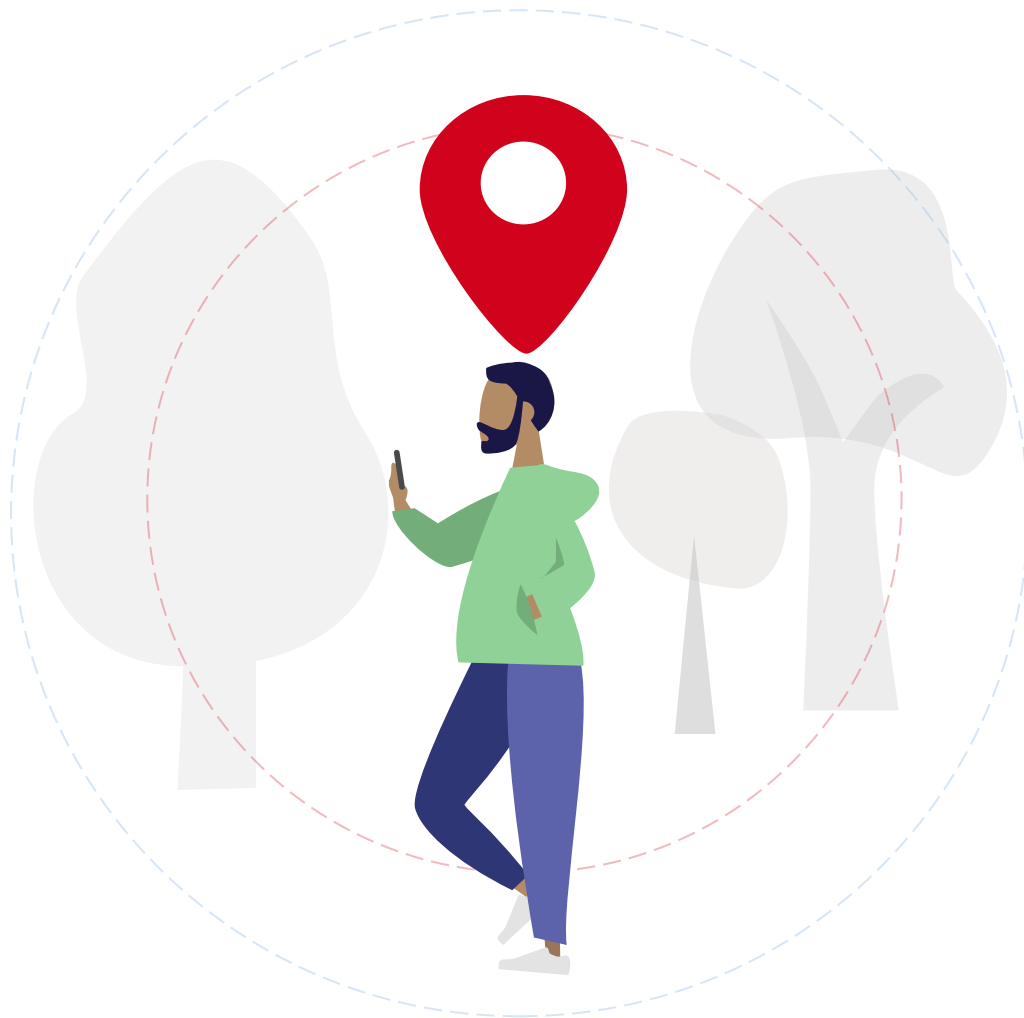
Service User records

Every service user comes with a wealth of information. Even if you have the same carer assigned to them day after day, it's helpful to have a set of records to refer back to – such as their care plan, important contacts, medical history and even notes about personal preferences. This becomes even more important if there's handover between carers.

The CQC supports this approach:

“Staff can access digital care plans and records more easily. They can record information in real time. This can be quickly and accurately shared to help keep people safe, and highlight key information, such as up to date medical and allergy information.”

Again, digitising your record storage for these records allows expiry reminders to be set for any documents as well as greater freedom of what media types are stored for each service user.



Call Scheduling and Tracking

If you're managing a team of carers and you're looking to improve day-to-day efficiency through technology, you have probably considered a digital roster. From scheduling repeat calls to assigning appropriate carers, a digital approach dramatically reduces administration time.

Advanced rostering solutions, such as [CarePlanner](#), will even flag alerts if carers are assigned to calls they are not suited to (skills, preferences or continuity mismatch)

or do not have sufficient time to reach, based on their previous call location. The time savings from this typically run to around 10 hours of rota admin time saved per every 1,000 hours of care delivered – for example [County Care saved 35 hours per week](#) for 3,200 hours of care rostered by going digital.

Time savings are not limited to the roster. Rota generation and distribution can be automated, or vastly simplified when scheduling electronically. Furthermore, ad hoc changes can be distributed to carers without the need to re-print rotas or manually contact each carer.



The flexibility of digital rosters and individual care rotas can also accommodate external factors, such as traffic delays, through integration with external systems (digital mapping solutions in the case of this example). This produces a far more dynamic, robust solution to managing care commitments – enabling more carers to be brought in quickly when needs arise.



Call Monitoring for transparency and fairness

With more accurate tracking of call and travel durations, care managers can run reports to check carers are not exceeding their agreed hours.

Furthermore, your invoices can accurately reflect time spent at appointments and travelling to them. Asking carers to manually

complete timesheets becomes a thing of the past, as they clock in and out of appointments via an app, NFC tag or other digital method.

Call monitoring can provide real time insight back to administrators about who is where, when. This insight can be used to ensure care

is being delivered where and when it is needed, and measures are taken to address delays before they become a serious problem.

Connecting to your Carers

Digital processes enable far better communication between care managers and carers. Reach your carers via their preferred platform – through app notifications, SMS or email. Sending out an update to a rota just takes the push of a button, rather than printing and physically handing it to them.

Some rostering solutions even provide carers with directions to reach each appointment. Integrating with online mapping providers can update these directions dynamically to avoid the latest traffic problems.

Communication need not be just one way. Carers should be able to utilise the same channels to update care managers with any news, or in response to messages about availability for additional work. Care plans and handover notes enable carers to provide detailed feedback on outcomes from each appointment – alerting care managers of the current status and providing valuable continuity of care when another carer visits the same service user at a later date.



Reporting and Accountability



Reporting to the CQC

Every care provider wants to perform well in light of CQC's KLOEs and technology helps many achieve this. Providing better quality of care, having more time to care (through more efficient use of resources) and ensuring carers have service user information more easily to hand are all ways in which technology supports these efforts.

You'll no doubt be aware of the reports that a CQC inspector is likely to demand during a visit, so having a system in place that can generate these quickly and accurately is a big plus – as well as making the inspection go more smoothly.

The CQC has been seemingly reluctant to recommend specific technology to enhance the delivery and management of care, but this appears to be changing. There has been a [recent round table](#) on the topic and it's likely that the outcome from this and similar discussions will filter into recommendations and inspection metrics before long.

The regulator does, however, refer to the value of digital processes under its Well-led line of inquiry through the recommendation that "Anonymised data collected can be shared, compared and analysed to identify risks and themes, providing a bigger picture." Solutions with powerful reporting and analytics functions will be best placed to deliver on this.



GDPR Accountability and Compliance

GDPR compliance has been a legal requirement for all businesses since May 2018. Digital processes have both forced GDPR into existence and enabled the compliance with this in ways paper-based processes struggle to do.

At the heart of the GDPR lies the requirement for greater transparency and accountability regarding data. Digital processes provide an unprecedented opportunity to trace the flow of data and who was responsible for it at each stage. Retaining a log of data handling, communications and system changes for each user provides a solid foundation for GDPR compliance. This log can be generated automatically and produced on demand, if required, saving considerable time over manually doing this for paper-based approaches.



Efficiency and Performance Improvement

Moving your agency processes over to digital platforms affords an opportunity to analyse everything. The better integrated your digital processes, the more holistic your analytics can be.

When performance of different aspects of the business are grouped and analysed over time, anomalies become easier to spot. Spotting and addressing anomalies retrospectively is one thing, but taking this insight to prevent future anomalies, or learn from examples in the data, saves time and improves performance as you move forward.

This ease of analysis makes digital processes easier to refine and improve. Regular performance reporting should empower managers to identify opportunities and target performance improvement with confidence.

Care Plans and eMARs

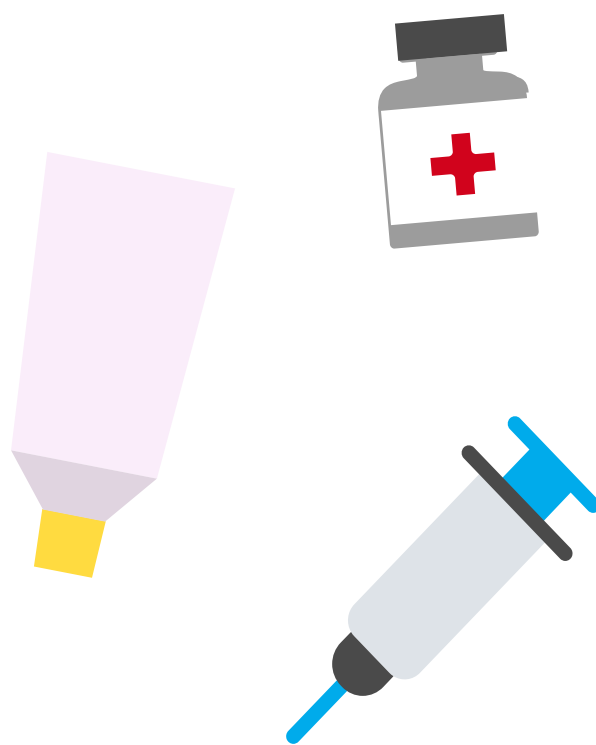
Technology has enabled considerable improvements in the detail of care delivery. Equipping carers with detailed care plans and medication delivery requirements can considerably reduce errors in care delivery. Dovetailing this with tools to report on the outcomes from this delivery keeps care managers informed on the progress of this delivery.

Platforms like EveryLIFE PASSsystem and Birdie provide the tools to easily create detailed care plans and electronic medical access records (eMARs), as well as record, report and generate alerts based on the outcomes from these.

To put the value of eMARs into context, they are referenced, as follows, in a [recent CQC report](#).

“The key contributing factor for administration errors was poor record keeping. We saw that MARs were either not completed, or not completed accurately. Discontinued medicines and incorrect strengths of medicines were sometimes found on MAR charts.

“These types of errors were more likely when MAR charts were hand-written or included additional hand-written medicines. Where MARs were hand-written in care homes, they had not always been second checked to ensure they were accurate.”





What Next?

Technology doesn't stand still, so how are digital processes in domiciliary care likely to develop in the future? One increasing trend is how different solutions integrate to provide end-to-end coverage of the care process. Care managers do not want to have to log in to multiple different systems, nor do carers, so disparate systems must integrate to provide a single digital process.

Simplified workflows across connected systems will save admin time and reduce the risk of human error – ultimately resulting in higher quality of care and less wasted time. Say goodbye to copy-pasting data, or even exporting and importing from one system to another. APIs (application programming interfaces) are the facilitator for this high-speed and secure machine-to-machine communication: ask your solution provider about their plans in this area.

Better communication between systems is likely to lead to a growth in connected digital service providers. Domiciliary care agencies will most likely have a core set of systems, operating as one, but bolt on to external systems as and when needed. This streamlining will save yet more time.

As confidence in connected services grows, domiciliary agencies will feel happier about sharing their data externally (always in compliance with GDPR requirements) and benefiting from the two way flow of data and insight this can bring.

One area which promises to capitalise on secure access to domiciliary care data (via an API, of course) is the application of artificial intelligence. There is potential to take in information, such as notes on call outcomes, and search these for patterns of words which are known to be typically associated with health outcomes at a later time. For example, patterns in service user appetite/mood/response to medication may act as powerful indicators of health issues which could be tackled preemptively, before they have more serious consequences.

Fundamentally, domiciliary care systems are set to become far more connected over time. Through this connection we will see improvements in efficiency and the ability to predict needs before they manifest. This can only lead to enhanced quality of care for service users.



Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that there are dramatic time and efficiency savings to be achieved through embracing the right digital processes in domiciliary care. It's easy to make the case for moving from paper to digital, but the right type of digital is as important (if not more) than simply going digital.

Tackle your efficiency targets, GDPR requirements, workforce satisfaction and future-proofing all in one hit by selecting the right solutions for your requirements. Plan for the future, but find the right solution for your needs now.

GDPR can be thought of as one of the minimum requirements to take into account. Going digital should be about empowering your staff to become more efficient and deliver better quality of care in the available time.

When looking at saving time through digital processes, keep in mind that technology should always work for you – not the other way around. Make sure it is easy to use and a vendor is confident enough to offer unlimited and/or free support.

For processes to be truly efficient, they need to be quickly accepted by your workforce. Solutions should be easy to access from anywhere, work on devices your teams are happy using (e.g. mobile phones) and training should be simple. If in doubt, reach out to existing users of solutions you are considering and get their view on these points.

The most effective way to save time through digital processes today will unlikely be the most effective route in a year's time. So, stay flexible. Make sure any changes will offer the freedom to integrate and adapt to give access to the best advances in technology as they become available. There's no need to get locked into contracts of a year (or more): seek out providers of solutions who have the confidence to license their solutions flexibly.



➤ About CarePlanner

CarePlanner optimises the planning and management of social care. It offers one system, from scheduling through to invoicing, which simplifies, automates and alerts to reduce human error. This allows you to focus on delivering outstanding care, whilst CarePlanner takes the strain of scheduling, tracking and reporting.

Working with a broad range of social care agencies, we developed CarePlanner to meet the complex needs of this sector. The system blends clarity with control. You can customise every aspect of how CarePlanner works, to provide every user with their ideal interface – from care workers, to schedulers, to finance and management.