

Dear Secretary of State

The NHS needs to significantly improve the way it harnesses information technology and uses information to meet the challenges of improving productivity, redesigning services and improving quality.

Improving the quality of information – and making it available to patients, commissioners and providers in a transparent and timely manner – will be critical to the success of the government's health reforms. The critical role that information must play in NHS modernisation was set out in the Information Revolution and was reaffirmed by the Future Forum.

Yet there are real challenges to translating this vision into reality. The quality of information in the NHS is often poor and the processes in place to protect patient confidentiality are variable. The very significant problems with the National Programme for IT in the NHS have only served to compound this.

The Information Revolution is at risk unless these challenges are addressed. To help overcome them it is essential that there is far greater clinical engagement in the design and delivery of information and technology programmes than has occurred to date. To secure the necessary clinical engagement will require a new type of clinical information champion.

EHealth Insider, www.ehi.co.uk, the leading news service on NHS IT and information management, is therefore launching a campaign focusing on the need to develop clinical information champions. The EHI CCIO Campaign is already backed by both the Royal College of Physicians and the British Computer Society.

The campaign objective is simple: for every NHS provider organisation to consider appointing a dedicated chief clinical information officer, in order to ensure that there is clear and sustained clinical leadership on IT and information projects to support improvements in the quality of care.

The new CCIO role will build on the skills of existing NHS IT professionals, and help NHS organisations ensure that high quality information is at the heart of everything they do.

This is an important new role that will appeal to a wide range of clinicians, many of whom already have worked on IT and information projects, often in addition to their 'core' job. With appropriate support, today's local informal clinical information champions have the potential to become the NHS's first CCIOs.

Therefore, as a first step towards appointing a CCIO, we recommend that you call on every NHS provider organisation to identify a senior clinician to act as its clinical information champion, to help it play its full part in delivering the NHS Information Revolution.

As the government moves from listening to implementation, it will be important to demonstrate leadership on the NHS information agenda. Without strong clinical leadership, the Information Revolution may falter. We urge you to send a strong signal to the NHS by backing the EHI CCIO Campaign.

Yours sincerely,

Jon Hoeksma
EHI co-founder and editor, www.ehi.co.uk