

Dear NHSE

I am writing as Chair of Tower Hamlets Local Medical Committee to express concern about the ongoing threat of GP@Hand to our local primary care health economy.

Latest figures show that Tower Hamlets CCG is the biggest financial loser of all the London boroughs as a result of GP@Hand. I know that you are aware of the precarious state of General Practice across the country. In Tower Hamlets we have managed to stave off the worst of this due to our collective, collaborative and evidence based working. We have some of the best outcomes for Childhood immunisations and chronic disease management such as hypertension and COPD in England, despite being one of the most deprived boroughs. This excellent care is delivered because we work in tight local teams, adhering to well prepared local shared care guidelines and referral pathways. All of this is at risk with the GP@Hand model. How can a remote General Practice hope to be able to work collaboratively and within local guidelines?

The arguments against the GP@Hand model are well rehearsed, the most concerning is that it provides access for those who are likely to need it least at the expense of those who are likely to need it most.

We are not against technology when it is equitable and evidence based but the GP@Hand model is neither. The fact that there are so many exclusions means that it is inequitable, let alone the fact the only way of accessing the service is through the app so denying access to those who either cannot or do not choose to register in this way. We cannot understand why there is so much impetus to expand the model when the pilot hasn't even finished and so many reasonable concerns have been raised by so many people.

We urge NHSE to take the threat of GP@Hand to the wider health economy very seriously. It would be a travesty if the momentum behind this model allowed it to let rip only to find that those urging caution had been right all along. The NHS cannot afford yet another, very costly, ill conceived IT project.

Surely the way to develop technology and move into the world of Apps is to do so in a coordinated and properly funded way across the NHS, creating access in this way for those who wish to avail themselves of it, but as part of a menu of options for access so that no one is excluded. If the technology was available to all of General Practice and all patients there would be little need for the Out of Area Registration Scheme which GP@Hand exploits and health economies could confidently explore and develop the integrated care pathways that we all know are best for patients.

With best wishes

Dr Jackie Applebee,
Chair Tower Hamlets LMC