Advances for information exchange between healthcare organisations

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Major healthcare IT vendor Orion Health is amongst the first suppliers accredited by NHS Digital to use a new NHS messaging service ('MESH') to exchange information between health and care systems. Orion Health's accreditation means that NHS organisations that use its Rhapsody™ Integration Engine can exchange information with other organisations using MESH.

"We were very pleased to receive accreditation from NHS Digital and we are now looking forward to working with our NHS customers to make use of this new service," said Anne O'Hanlon, Solution Consulting Director for Orion Health in EMEA. "This accreditation demonstrates our commitment to the techUK Interoperability Charter and NHS England's Open API policy."

Message Exchange for Social Care and Health (MESH) Application Programme Interface (API) is now the main message exchange service for health and social care. MESH has replaced the Data Transfer Service (DTS), which was introduced more than a decade ago to enable health and care systems to exchange information with each other, using modern web standards.

Currently, MESH is used by most GP practices to receive test results and clinical correspondence from hospitals. Users access these messages through a MESH client or, more commonly, through systems that have been integrated with MESH using an API.

"MESH is strategically important for the NHS in England. It gives organisations a common way to securely communicate with each other electronically across many different business processes. This includes when people change their GP, have a blood test or are discharged from hospital," O'Hanlon explained.

Orion Health integrated Rhapsody™ to the MESH API according to NHS Digital's specification. Several rounds of testing were undertaken to demonstrate the company could comply with the authentication requirements and handle any errors appropriately, O'Hanlon said.

Three hospitals in Liverpool and a major London hospital have already bought the new functionality to send pathology results and discharge summaries to GPs, O'Hanlon added.

MESH is built on Spine infrastructure and supports some important information flows, including: pathology results reporting, GP data extraction and payments, out of hours services, clinical correspondence and Open Exeter's screening services. New workflows are being added and NHS Digital is looking at how it could be used for communication with social care.

techUK's Interoperability Charter sets out the changes to interoperability standards that are needed to deliver better integrated health and care. Signatories to the Charter are committed to ensuring that their information systems are neither financial nor technical obstacles, but are the enablers of change in support of integrated care.

Meanwhile, NHS England has developed the Open API Policy and supporting guidance to assist local organisations in embedding the use of open APIs. Having key functionality openly available through an API ensures organisations can integrate systems and deliver the best systems to suit the needs of their different clinical and business functions.

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