UK Data Hubs Speed Up New Meds Research

The NHS has massive amounts of health data held within its various trusts and other facilities, and these "data silos" make it difficult for researchers and innovators to access and use important data about people's health. This problem will soon be a thing of the past as new data hubs – a total of seven – are set to be rolled out across the UK starting this month.

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These pioneering data research centres will use the latest advances in technology to connect and analyse health data from existing locations and in partnership with the NHS. Led by Health Data Research UK, these data hubs will speed up research for new medicines, treatments, and innovations that support quicker diagnoses and save lives.

According to HDRUK, patients, researchers and clinicians will work together to explore the safe and ethical use of health data for research into specific diseases including cancer, Crohn's disease and asthma. The data hubs will link up different types of health data and make it more easily accessible and user-friendly for research. To maintain strict controls around data privacy and consent, HDRUK explains that patients will be involved in decisions about how their data is used.

Each data hub was selected following an open competition by an independent panel involving patient and public representatives. They were assessed against criteria that included the potential for impact, the innovative uses of data, plans for involving patients and the public, and the value for public funding.

More than 100 organisations from the NHS and universities to charities and technology and pharmaceutical companies across the UK are involved in the hubs. Their collective expertise is important in maximising the value of health data research potentially benefiting millions of people across the country.

The seven hubs include:

- A cancer hub that aims to transform how cancer data from across the UK can be used to improve patient care, diagnose the disease earlier, and enable people to access innovative new medicines
- An eye health hub that will use data and advanced analytics, including artificial intelligence, to develop new insights in eye disease and how this applies to wider health such as dementia and diabetes
- An inflammatory bowel disease hub that will use data to address the urgent need to better understand why patients with Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis respond differently to treatments
- An acute care hub that will use data from community health, the ambulance service and hospitals to enable innovative healthcare companies to develop, test and deliver advances in clinical care
- A clinical trials hub to increase opportunities for patients to participate in clinical trials
- A respiratory hub that aims to improve the lives of people with respiratory conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- A hub that aims to use real world data to improve understanding of many long-term conditions, starting with Type 2 Diabetes, finding new life saving treatments by using advanced technologies, and even preventing them altogether.

"Creating these hubs and the wider secure infrastructure will, for the first time, give researchers the opportunity to use [health] data at scale to research the genetic, lifestyle and social factors behind many familiar common diseases and identify revealing data trends which may help with finding cures or treatments," said Professor Andrew Morris, Director of HDRUK.

The Health Data Research Hubs are part of a four-year £37million investment from the UK Government Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) announced in November 2017 to create a UK-wide system for the safe and responsible use of health-related data on a large scale.

Source: Health Data Research UK
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