

Our Health Secretary's blind faith in IT and corporate business delivery betrays our need for professional–personal intelligence, engagement and judgement

Our Health Secretary has made several recent statements vaunting the presumed benefits of an NHS increasingly subcontracted to large corporate businesses and delivered remotely by various social media channels. His ideas, necessarily, involve the decommissioning of professional judgement and intelligence, local and personal knowledge, and personal continuity of care.

This preferential shift to corporate business delivery has been recently shown to be markedly unsuited to test and trace of Covid. Serco, Sitel et al might well muster industrial capacity for this task, but that is very different from having the professional competence and cognisance to do so. The side-lining of our tried-and-tested lab-based and community NHS staff is costing us dearly.

A similar misjudgement seems to inform his recommendations for the future of general practice. Remote consultations via giant amalgamated practices which bypass personal and neighbourhood knowledge and understanding will often produce care that is clumsily decontextualised, and thus inaccurate and inefficient. Such commercially corporatised care also produces a new kind of crowded loneliness – for both practitioners and patients – that is becoming increasingly characteristic of our NHS.