“Be brave to get the technology to help you give better care”

In the past two years, I have had the fantastic opportunity of talking to many nurses, midwives and health visitors about information technology and how it can enable practice. I’ve heard lots of great stories and ideas about what could be possible. But I’ve also heard about numerous challenges, particularly about how health professionals can secure investment for their ideas.

Nurses, midwives and health visitors have great ideas; we become energised when we have conversations about the art of the possible and how they could work better and provide better-quality care, often using some fairly basic technology.

Last month, the prime minister announced that £100m would be offered to the NHS for nurses and midwives to spend on new technology that would free up time for patient care and help make essential patient details instantly available on the ward, at the bedside or in the community. Nurses and midwives – whether they work in a hospital, in the community or in another care setting – would decide what kit was best for their own workplace. This was music to my ears.

At last, here is a great opportunity for us to start to modernise the way we work in lots of settings. The technology could include digital pens and other handheld mobile devices that would give health professionals access to the most up-to-date information about a patient, and support the provision of safer, quicker care. This will also improve the way in which we help patients to look after themselves and learn about their conditions.

The more I connect with nurses, the more I hear brilliant ideas. I had a Twitter conversation with a school nurse who wanted to explore how technology could be used to support the care of young people. It seemed so obvious – QR (quick response) codes could be used to help link young people to good information, and new ways of using social media, such as those employed by Facebook.

Staff also want to get involved in developing apps that meet their specific needs, whether that is collecting information so they can demonstrate the quality of the service they offer or collecting feedback from patients. As I say – all great ideas.

But, to do this, we need nurses to have their own smartphones.

I would strongly encourage nurses in the front line to be active in the conversations they have about what technology would help them locally.

Be brave – go and knock on the door of your director of nursing and director of IT and explain how technology could help you. It is unlikely to be an easy conversation as technology can be complex. But my advice is stay focused on what you and your team need to improve the care you offer.

You will need two of the 6Cs from the nursing vision to do this. As with everything, change is always a challenge and will require Commitment and Courage – but that’s what nursing is about, after all.

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