

6 January 2017

PRESS RELEASE: BMA warns against over reliance on new triage app for patients

In response to the launch of a trial of a new triage app offering automated advice for patients:

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Responding to the launch of a trial of a new triage app offering automated advice for patients, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, BMA GP committee chair, said:

“Whilst it's always important to maximise the use of new technology to empower patients and make efficient use of NHS resources, this initiative does not address the fundamental problem that we have a severe shortage of GPs and health professionals in community settings.

"It's important to recognise that patients in greatest need, such as older people, may not be able or inclined to use technology or smartphones. There will also always be a need for human discussion regarding certain symptoms and their context which cannot be put into an e-consultation. The basic problem with NHS 111 is how it slavishly relies on algorithms and non-clinical staff without room for clinical interpretation in certain instances.

"Owing to the lack of input from a trained professional, this simplistic system could, like NHS111, result in more people being sent to overstretched GP or A&E services who don't actually need treatment or conversely serious conditions being missed. This proposal does not address this fundamental limitation. What we should instead be doing is investing in having properly trained and appropriate clinical staff handling calls and requests from patients, complementing the use of new technologies.”

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