

Nuffield Council on Bioethics

Mr Matt Hancock
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Dear Mr Hancock

RE: *Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s.*

I am writing in response to the recent Department of Health and Social Care / Cabinet Office consultation: *Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s.*

Whilst we were not in a position to offer a detailed response to your specific survey questions, I do wish to acknowledge this consultation as an important statement of the vision of healthcare over the next decade, which has very many laudable ambitions.

The use of genomics, big data and AI in particular to help drive a new preventive and personalised healthcare system raises exciting possibilities but also a range of questions: for example on ensuring people's privacy; safeguarding and appropriate use of data; and the changing nature of the doctor/patient relationship. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics' 2015 report, [The collection, linking and use of data in biomedical research and health care: ethical issues](#) sets out considerations regarding the use of data in health care and key ethical principles for the design and governance of data initiatives, and our 2010 report, "[Medical profiling and online medicine: the ethics of 'personalised healthcare' in a consumer age](#)" examines developments including direct-to-consumer personal genetic profiling, 'predictive' body imaging and other areas that raise ethical questions.

More recently our bioethics briefing note, [Artificial intelligence \(AI\) in healthcare and research](#) examined the current and potential applications of AI, its limits, and the ethical issues arising from its use. We concluded that a key challenge will be ensuring AI is developed and used in a way that is transparent and compatible with the public interest, whilst stimulating and driving innovation in the sector.

Whilst wide public consultation is important at this stage, it is equally essential that there is as much opportunity as possible for ongoing public engagement with some of the novel areas that it entails, as well as with the fundamental and over-arching question about individual and shared responsibilities for health.

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It will be vital that this public discourse and the policy development that will ensue should be informed by consideration of the wider social and ethical aspects of not just the new technologies, but also the societal, structural and systemic changes that will accompany a shifting or evolving health environment where prediction, prevention and personalisation become more meaningful elements of health services.

I believe that the various projects that we have conducted (as above) can help illuminate discussions in many of these areas, and we would be very happy to contribute further, as and when that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hugh Whittall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H' and a trailing flourish.

Hugh Whittall
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