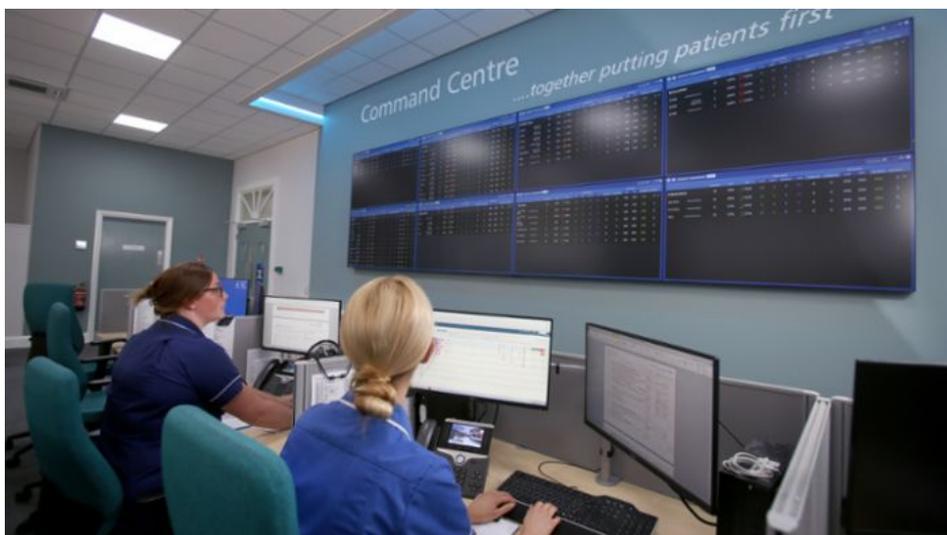newsroom

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Innovation Tackles the Virus

Digital innovations not only simplify the lives of doctors and patients but can protect them too. With that aim, GE Healthcare—a manufacturer of medical systems—wants to do away with waiting rooms.

Staff in the Command Centre at Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust use live data to optimise patient flow in real-time at several hospitals in Bradford and communities across Yorkshire.

That is the case with the waiting room app conceived at the hackathon in Munich. It is intended to allow patients to send data to medical offices before their appointments, or to be notified in real time of delays. The app could complement a product that GE Healthcare has already developed: its Smart Scheduling app. This system considers multiple factors that influence whether patients will

keep their appointments, such as: How far does the patient live from the doctor's office? What weather conditions are forecast for the day? Has the patient canceled appointments at particular times of the day before? An algorithm generates dates and times that match the patient's preferences. This improves doctors' abilities to plan—and also helps ensure that waiting rooms are less crowded. The app is expected to be used for the first time at doctors' offices this summer. Sparsely populated waiting rooms then will not only help patients feel more relaxed, but also protect their health.

"If the pandemic had broken out two years earlier, the situation would have been much more challenging," says Beger. "The past several weeks have shown that there are a lot of opportunities to be had from digitalizing healthcare. That gives me hope for the future." The coronavirus, he says, is helping to accelerate these developments.

Marathon for Hackers

GE Healthcare's development of digital innovations also makes use of innovations in the development methods themselves. These include hackathons, at which teams of individuals from a variety of disciplines develop solutions to specified challenges within limited periods of time. The idea for an app that would reduce the time spent in waiting rooms came from the TECHFEST hackathon in the fall of 2019, organized by Munich's UnternehmerTUM center for innovation and start-ups. Hackathons are not only a good way to develop products, says Jan Beger, General Manager Digital at GE Healthcare. "They also teach us how agile and self-organized teams can achieve results quickly and effectively. We apply the knowledge we gain from them to our own processes."

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