



Good seed Benedict Loveless, the Chichester Cathedral verger, is surrounded by some of the 50,000 blooms used in the Festival of Flowers, which ends on Saturday

NHS hires ex-Tesco boss to make virtual care ‘like online shopping’

Eleanor Hayward Health Editor

The NHS has appointed a former Tesco boss to lead a new virtual hospital in an attempt to make accessing healthcare as convenient as online shopping.

John Browett, who was chief executive of Tesco.com, Dunelm, Dixons and Monsoon, was announced yesterday as the first chairman of NHS Online.

The new NHS service will launch in autumn 2027 and treat patients by matching them with specialist doctors for consultations carried out by video calls, saving them trips to hospital.

Browett, 62, told The Times it was vital for the NHS to catch up with the “digital revolution” and offer online care where possible to boost productivity and cut waiting lists of 71 million.

“There are lots of examples from the commercial world where people have completely changed the way that they interact with products and services,” he added. “In the private health sector,

[appointments] have moved online, at least for the initial triage, because it’s more convenient for the patient, more effective and more productive.”

Browett launched Tesco.com in 2000, one of the first online grocery shopping services. He also oversaw an expansion of online shopping at Dixons, Dunelm and Monsoon. In 2012 he was made head of Apple’s worldwide retail operation in the first major hire by Tim Cook, who was Steve Jobs’s successor. However, Browett acknowledged he “didn’t get it quite right” — and was sacked six months later.

“The digital revolution we’re all going through is continuing, it just never stops,” said Browett, who was headhunted for the new job and urged to take it up by his husband, who works as an NHS therapist.

“There are lots of instances where actually going into hospital to meet a specialist is very inconvenient for the patient,” he added. “Obviously not all

patient interactions can be done online. The NHS is very much a physical world and people will still need to have operations. You’ll still need to go in for tests.”

However, he said that many appointments, such as those discussing test results, could be done virtually. “That should mean we can get through the waiting lists faster, people can be seen quicker and be seen more efficiently and productively. The opportunity is to get rid of all the paper and all of the administration [for appointments].”

The new NHS online service was announced by Sir Keir Starmer in September, and will initially focus on menopause, prostate, eye and stomach conditions before expanding.

Patients who are referred to a specialist by their GP will have the option of selecting NHS Online on the NHS app and be matched with a doctor. Appointments will also be offered online and in the evenings.

Browett said this would “improve

people’s experience at the NHS quite significantly” by boosting access in areas with long waiting lists, and making it easier for people to juggle appointments around childcare and work.

James Murray, the health secretary, said: “We’re bringing the NHS into the digital age and in line with the technology people use every day, so John’s knowhow from the private sector will be crucial. By cutting waiting lists and connecting people to experts from their homes, NHS Online is going to make a real, tangible difference to patients.”

Dr Penny Dash, the chair of NHS England, said: “NHS Online will transform the way we deliver planned care for people in England ... John Browett’s extensive expertise in customer-focused and digitally enabled service industries will be invaluable as he leads the establishment of NHS Online, as well as working with other NHS leaders to ensure it is integrated into the wider NHS and works for patients.”

Hundreds to gain access to new ovarian cancer drug

Eleanor Hayward Health Editor

Hundreds of women with ovarian cancer will benefit from a new drug on the NHS in the biggest breakthrough against the disease for two decades.

The health service has announced it will roll out Elahere, or mirvetuximab soravtansine, to about 400 patients a year with advanced ovarian cancer that has stopped responding to standard chemotherapy. It is the first new

treatment since the early 2000s for this group of patients, who typically have poor survival rates, and trials show it adds several months to their lives while reducing side-effects.

The treatment, developed by the pharmaceutical company AbbVie, is a targeted therapy that works by attaching to cancer cells and destroying them.

Ovarian cancer is one of the deadliest gynaecological cancers worldwide. In the UK, there are about 7,500 new cases

and 4,000 deaths a year. Standard treatment involves surgery and chemotherapy, but about 80 per cent of patients with advanced disease relapse and develop resistance to chemotherapy.

Patricia Hill, 64, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2023 and began treatment with the drug in January. She said: “It’s been incredibly positive ... This is the first time that I’ve actually been able to get on with my life in terms of the impact of side-effects.”

The treatment is given via a drip over two to four hours, once every three weeks. In a global clinical trial involving eight NHS hospitals, the group on the new drug lived for 16.5 months on average, compared with 12.8 months for chemotherapy. Tumours shrank for 37 per cent of patients on the new drug, compared with 16 per cent for chemotherapy. It will be available on the NHS from today after it was approved by the health watchdog.

Quintagram® No 2585

Solve all five concise clues using each letter underneath once only

1 Female bird (3)

2 Meal (6)

3 Sleep (7)

4 Gimlet or sidecar, eg (8)

5 Type of anniversary (8)

A	A	B	B	C	C	D	D
E	E	E	H	H	I	I	I
K	L	L	M	N	N	N	O
R	R	R	S	T	T	U	Y

Solutions see T2 MindGames p15
Cryptic clues T2 MindGames p14

Baby formula sickness

Sixty-one babies in the UK were reported to have fallen ill after consuming infant formula contaminated with the cereulide toxin, the UK Health Security Agency said in an update, an increase on 36 cases previously reported. The first product recall notice was issued in January. The toxin was traced to an ingredient made by a Chinese supplier.

Fiancée wins rites case

The fiancée of a London rail worker who took his own life after a cancer diagnosis has won a High Court battle with his Catholic mother over whether he should be cremated. The judge, Chief Master Karen Shuman, ruled that Toni Cameron, partner of Simon Comerford, 36, should oversee the funeral, noting his estrangement from his parents.

NatWest sacks snooper

A NatWest worker who harassed a neighbour in a parking row was sacked after accessing her bank accounts. Emma Edwards, 49, was caught when she called her neighbour a “benefit scrounger”. She admitted harassment and received a community resolution. Her neighbour, Becki Gilroy, 35, of Llanelli, south Wales, was awarded £1,000 in compensation.

MasterChef’s ‘bad cop’

The Michelin-starred chef Giorgio Locatelli is to replace John Torode as a judge on *Celebrity MasterChef*. The Italian, 63, joins Grace Dent after Torode and Gregg Wallace were dismissed last July. Locatelli, a long-time judge on *MasterChef Italia*, said he was the show’s “bad cop” while filming the series in Birmingham, adding: “I’m strict.”

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