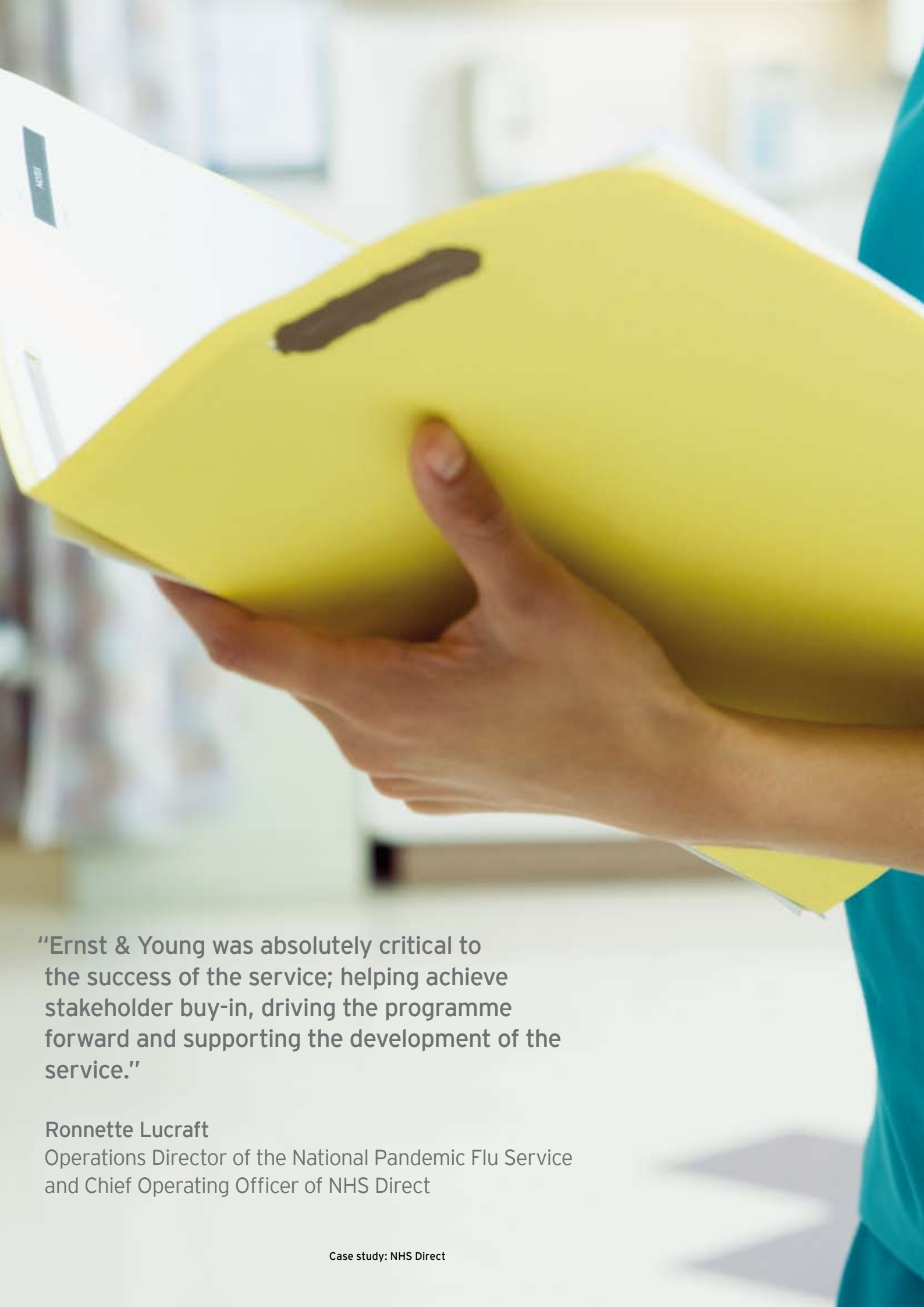




New healthcare delivery systems; calm in a pandemic

Case study: NHS Direct



“Ernst & Young was absolutely critical to the success of the service; helping achieve stakeholder buy-in, driving the programme forward and supporting the development of the service.”

Ronnette Lucraft

Operations Director of the National Pandemic Flu Service
and Chief Operating Officer of NHS Direct



Summary

New healthcare delivery systems; calm in a pandemic


- ▶ The UK's National Pandemic Flu Service is now recognised as the most advanced response to a pandemic ever. This was the first time, anywhere in the world, that the dispensing of prescription drugs was carried out without a doctor's consultation.
- ▶ In total, over 2.7 million assessments were completed saving the NHS more than £71 million in avoidable consultations, and ensuring that the right advice and medication got to large numbers of people in a timely fashion.
- ▶ Ernst & Young helped NHS Direct develop and deliver a highly effective pandemic flu response service to meet one of the greatest ever challenges to the UK health system; now used as a model of best practice.

“We turned to the history books to help predict demand; analysing outbreaks such as the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918 to help create appropriate models.”

The challenge for NHS Direct

Responding to a pandemic without a blueprint

Back in 2007, an outbreak of Swine Flu in the Philippines triggered global responses to pandemic management. The Department of Health had an existing pandemic programme in place but needed to find a way to cope with the potential of unprecedented levels of additional demand from a healthcare system which was already working near capacity. The threat of front line health professionals, particularly GPs, being overwhelmed by patients seeking antiviral drugs was real. Such a volume of additional demand could stop individuals with more life threatening complaints receiving treatment. A service was needed to protect health workers from the spread of the disease encouraging those affected to stay at home. Without an appropriate pandemic response service in place the health system could grind to a halt.



“...Consulting with health professionals, doctors, surgeons, nurses, health authorities and government led to authorisation of individual assessment and release of antiviral drugs without a doctor’s prescription; a first in UK healthcare.”

How Ernst & Young responded

Supporting operations and gaining buy in

A key part of the solution was the National Pandemic Flu Service, a multi-channel remote access service operated by NHS Direct that was resilient enough to meet public demand for assessment and antiviral authorisation across all the UK countries. This service enabled those with flu symptoms to obtain assessment and authorisation for release of antiviral drugs through a number of possible channels such as call centre or internet.

The UK's health services had been appointed to run the pandemic preparedness programme and the Department of Health in England recommended the support of NHS Direct in helping to define and shape this service. The service represented a significant change in established practice and therefore gaining stakeholder agreement was critical.

Ernst & Young was given two objectives; gaining necessary stakeholder approval, and supporting the client in the development of an automated telephony solution, website and call centre. Inevitably, there were stakeholders who were sceptical about the change in established practice, so the response needed to ensure there was robust governance. All approaches were agreed up-front, decisions managed carefully and solid governance and controls put in place. This ensured that the very complex group of clinical, technical and sponsor stakeholders took ownership of the solution.

The approach to communication and engagement needed to be both interactive and proactive. A clear vision and robust rationale to support the changes were central to establishing credibility and obtaining sponsorship at senior levels. At regular intervals, workshops and stakeholder sessions were run to ensure understanding of the patient journey using the service. It wasn't physically possible for us to reach out to every stakeholder so it was important to use NHS Direct's networks and relationships to cascade information and encourage buy-in. Internally, we supported NHS Direct in bringing structure to the delivery of the service by shaping content, managing stakeholder engagement and consulting with technology partners.

Our consultants were drawn from Ernst & Young's people and organisational change group, technology practice, process team, customer and call centre team and its operations and supply chain practice. In all, some 20 consultants worked alongside the team from NHS Direct providing a significant contribution and rounded project response.

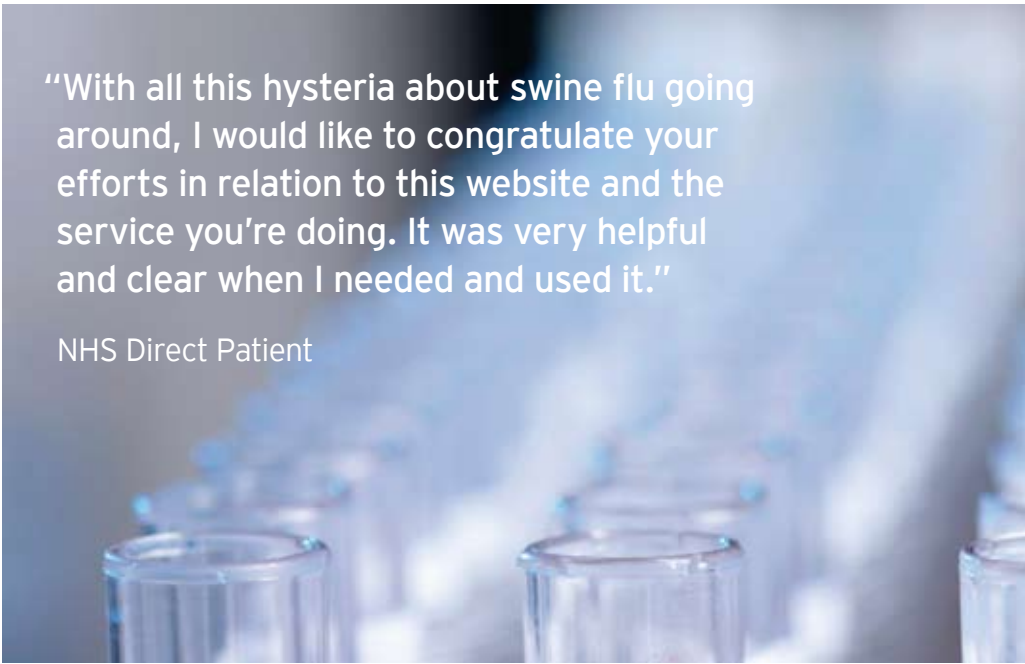
How Ernst & Young achieved success

Healthy organisation, intelligent support

When the pandemic struck, we had to mobilise not just the call centres and websites, but also support NHS Direct in mobilising the operations hub. The IT supplier needed to be in place to deliver and support the service and the Department of Health made ready to manage the supply of antiviral drugs.

Robust organisation structures and controls and strong leadership combined with a delivery focus kept the challenges of stewarding the service to a minimum. In this instance, there was no such thing as too much communication; the stakeholder landscape was particularly complex so early and regular engagement with the devolved health authorities was essential in developing a national solution that met the needs of the UK countries.

Gathering input from a diverse user community meant that different perspectives could be drawn upon to deliver an effective service. This also provided a level of sponsorship and support for the service and ensured that the service was fit for purpose. In all, the Ernst & Young response was considered intelligent and vigorous. Providing highly capable support and solutions where no best practice existed could - for some - have proved too daunting. In organising and shaping the content, we helped to launch a highly successful service.



“With all this hysteria about swine flu going around, I would like to congratulate your efforts in relation to this website and the service you’re doing. It was very helpful and clear when I needed and used it.”

NHS Direct Patient


What was interesting about Ernst & Young's approach?

Preparedness and awareness of the consequences of failure

It became clear that there was considerable external interest in the service - it was already on the Government's top ten list of risks. If the project failed, it would have been a very public failure; it was critical that there was a high level of preparedness.

As well as making sure that the people and processes were fit for purpose, NHS Direct teams had to be prepared for the challenges of running a very different type of service. Our project team facilitated a number of role-play sessions with NHS Direct teams based on likely pandemic scenarios. These sessions helped familiarise staff with the demands of the many different roles they would need to assume and the quick decisions that they would need to make during a pandemic.

Mounting media interest and significant outbreaks of the pandemic, kept sharp focus on the potential consequences of failure. Primary care services could have been stretched to the limit and patients put at risk. This constant reminder of the potential effect of failure helped tone and speed up the response.



“At the point of launching the national Flu Service, there were no other examples of an equivalent service in the UK or anywhere else in the world. It is ready to be mobilised again if required and really has set the benchmark by which other services will be measured.”

How NHS Direct has benefited

Opening a door to remote care

This project helped senior government officials understand that healthcare can be delivered in many different ways. The UK was the only country that provided a service of this type during a pandemic; it is still seen as advanced and ground-breaking. All objectives of responding to a pandemic were met; the service worked and demand on GPs was averted. In total, 2.7 million assessments were made saving the NHS £71 million¹. Nearly 2 million unique reference numbers (which were used as a proxy for a prescription) were issued and over 1 million antiviral doses collected.

The project attracted a good deal of interest from health departments in other countries and has influenced other alternative healthcare systems.

About NHS Direct

Launched in 1997, NHS Direct provides clinical care and services across a range of channels using its virtual national network of call centres and home-workers. They use telephone-based care management and telehealth technology to assess patients' symptoms, provide self-care advice, help patients to access appropriate urgent care, manage their long-term conditions and make choices about their care. NHS Direct also provides the Department of Health and wider NHS with a source of resilience in the face of national health emergencies.

¹ Source: NHS Direct report, Pandemic Flu Service, Addendum to the Flu Line Full Business Case, Section 1.1.17 Service usage, 19 August, 2011



NHS Direct

What the client said

“The national flu pandemic posed one of the greatest ever challenges to our established health system. The fundamental shift in operations required to maintain an effective health service was for some unsettling and for many perplexing: how to deliver vastly increased volumes of diagnosis and prescription without a matched increase in clinicians. Ernst & Young was absolutely critical to the success of the service. They should be congratulated on their contribution.”

Nick Chapman
Chief Executive Officer
NHS Direct



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