

## Staring into the crystal ball

My medical student elective in the early 1990s involved travel to western Australia for a rich learning experience with superb breast-surgery and haematology teams. Communication with family and friends back home was by aerogramme (remember those, now discontinued, light blue letters that folded to form an envelope?) as international phone calls were prohibitively expensive. Taking a week to write, post and receive, this gave a two-week cycle time for each update of news from home. Contrast this with a return to Perth a couple of years ago; within an hour of arriving, I had video-called home to my wife and played an online game with my son while being able to simultaneously chat – all using my mobile phone through the hotel's free WiFi. This transformation would have sounded like distant science fiction to my medical student self – yet that same medical student would easily recognise the NHS of today.

'Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future.'  
Niels Bohr, Nobel laureate in physics.

Commissioning papers that ask for future predictions about the NHS was never going to be easy. Dr Na'eem Ahmed and I accepted the challenge and I sincerely thank Na'eem for engaging such inspiring authors. We are delighted to be introducing this edition's focus on the future. Accelerating towards us at an ever-increasing speed, Davenport and Kalakota explore the potential for data, digitalisation and artificial intelligence in healthcare.<sup>1</sup> At the top of the current policy agenda they describe the implications of automation for the workforce. The future finances of the NHS and social care are explored by Watt *et al* comparing the UK to the international context.<sup>2</sup> They describe the effects of austerity, the ageing population

and increasing cost pressures while balancing this against productivity. High-quality leadership is recognised as essential for successfully navigating the future of the NHS. Bailey and Burhouse describe the leadership that will be required to develop the necessary culture with compassion.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Nick Bosanquet provides a personal view reflecting on many decades of changing healthcare policy and NHS structure.<sup>4</sup> He describes missed opportunities that we must learn from if we are to optimise the future of our beloved NHS.

From the 1990s to today, the aerogramme has long been made obsolete. In healthcare, we must be ready to embrace a similar scale of change and allow ourselves to truly 'do things differently' while letting go of our healthcare 'aerogrammes'. Together, these papers describe some of the policy, economics, technology and leadership that will be required to transform our NHS over the years ahead. ■

**Prof Tom Downes**  
Deputy editor-in-chief

### References

- 1 Davenport T, Kalakota R. The potential for artificial intelligence in healthcare. *Future Healthcare Journal* 2019;6:94–8.
- 2 Watt T, Charlesworth A, Gershlick B. Health and care spending and its value, past, present and future. *Future Healthcare Journal* 2019;6:99–105.
- 3 Bailey S, Burhouse A. From super-hero to super-connector, changing the leadership culture in the NHS. *Future Healthcare Journal* 2019;6:106–9.
- 4 Bosanquet N. The future of the NHS. *Future Healthcare Journal* 2019;6:110–3.