**Wednesday 6 September 2023**

**New research: Huge unmet demand for NHS prescription apps from UK patients**

**London, September 6, 2023** –New research from tech consulting and engineering firm Zühlke reveals that there is huge unmet demand for prescription apps from the NHS across the whole UK population – particularly for prevention of high-volume illnesses where the NHS is struggling to cope with demand, such as depression, anxiety, obesity & diabetes, and cancer.

Its research, published today, shows that over 60% of the population are interested in having apps prescribed by the NHS (over 70% for those under 39, and 65% for those in their forties). There is particularly high demand for ones to treat or prevent depression, pain management, obesity, diabetes and cancer (see slide below in the press release, and slides 23, 24 & 25 on the accompanying research deck).

In fact, people are already taking the matter into their own hands because of problems accessing GPs, with 55% of adults self-diagnosing their symptoms online in past 6 months, partly through challenges of getting appointments over the past 6 months (slide 4).

**Dr James Graveston, Zühlke’s Health & MedTech lead consultant and a former hospital doctor, says**: ‘In recent years, much of the population has started using fitness, diet, and wellness apps to improve their health and emotional wellbeing. They are raring to go with similar and more advance medical grade apps from the NHS as part of their treatment.

‘On the one hand, our research findings are good news for helping the NHS's Herculean task of getting waiting lists down. Apps and other digital medical services are low cost per-patient to deploy, provide consistent standards, and can bring huge advances in early diagnosis and preventative treatment, especially through integrated AI spotting early signs of serious problems. They are also particularly suitable for treating illnesses that are overwhelming the NHS’s capacity – such as mental health, diabetes and obesity.

‘The not-so-good news is the NHS is way behind in deploying such technologies, and the prospects of it speeding up without strong government intervention are not good. For instance, you can walk into almost any gym and get detailed information about your fitness activity and even body composition straight to your mobile phone. But go into a modern hospital or GP surgery and it’s a very different story, with little smart technology being used to support your treatment nor even give you basic medical information. It’s a situation that won’t change anytime soon.

'This poor state is a huge shame as for decades policymakers and medics have been keen to increase preventative treatment to stop illnesses at their early stages – which is clearly better for the patient and also cheaper for the health service. But it has not happened. Prescription medical apps, with properly joined-up digital plumbing behind them, would allow early intervention preventing high-risk individuals getting ill in the first place.’



**Chart: UK adults interested in having apps on prescription – and which problems they most interested in using one for treatment.**

Dr James Graveston added: ‘As our research shows, much of the population is raring to go and wants medical apps through the NHS. It will cut waiting times and given them more information, but better still, it will improve treatment – from basic medication reminders to avoiding GPs and hospitals altogether, whether through weight management apps or sophisticated ones using your phone and AI to spot early-stage skin cancer.

"But the highly desirable and overdue medical app revolution that the UK needs to cut queues, improve treatment outcomes, drive preventative medicine and empower patients has to be kick-started by the NHS – something it has so far been unable to do, and it is hard to see it happening with its current decentralized structure of procurement and deployment until this becomes an urgent priority at the highest levels of government.’

**Zühlke research findings include** (see the accompanying deck for greater information):

* **Brits want apps on prescription, particularly to treat anxiety and depression:** over 60% of the population are interested in having apps prescribed by the NHS (over 70% for those under 39, and 65% for those in their forties). There is particularly high demand for ones to treat anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders – representing 53% of those interested in a prescription app alone (see slides 23, 24 & 25).
* **Patients want NHS-endorsed apps:** 74% of people most trust a healthcare app provided by the NHS, but under 10% would most trust alternative providers such as BigTech (e.g. Apple, Amazon, etc), pharma companies, or MedTech start-ups (see slide 22).
* **Can pay – won't pay**: The population’s willingness to use medical grade apps is not matched with a willingness to pay for them.
* **The NHS brand overcomes many doubts:** Zühlke’s research also shows a large proporiton of people have concerns about their medical data privacy and the effectiveness of new technologies, but having the NHS prescribe medical-grade apps is sufficient to overcome the concerns of all but the most hardened sceptics – with a wapping 74% of the population seeing it as the most trusted brand for a heath app (see slides 9-17, and slide 21 & 22).
* **Brits are willing to share their health data – in the right circumstances:** 79% of people are prepared for some or all of their medical data to be used by an appropriate app. Only 21% of people would not want their personal medical data on an app under any circumstances.
* **Healthcare access problems are common:** 43% of the UK population has in the past 6 months ‘encountered challenges or difficulties’ in accessing healthcare services e.g. appointments, medical advice, ​and emergency care. 4% report not being able to get access at all (see slide 4).
* **More than half of patients now self-diagnose their health problems:** 55% say they used an app and/or the internet instead of going ​to a medical professional for self-diagnosis and/or treatment’ in the past 6 months (see slides 5 & 6 of the accompanying research summary for full details).

Dr Graveston adds: ‘The economic and medical case for a dramatic increase in the prescription of medical apps is incontrovertible, and our research shows that the demand is there from patients too. The NHS is creaking under the triple burdens of the huge and growing cost of staffing it, the inability to find sufficient numbers of staff, and the constantly rising demand for treatments.

‘By contrast apps, and other digital services, allow patients to get fast and consistent treatment, with far less cost per head. They also give patients more power over their own treatment. This is without factoring in the additional huge benefits from AI-generated insights from data analysis, allowing a whole new wave of early diagnosis and even prevention for many illnesses.’

**About the research**

The research was undertaken in May 2023 for Zühlke by accredited research agency Toluna, and involved a 1,000 person representative sample of the UK adult population. Full details of the demographics available on slide 3.

**About Zühlke’s healthcare and MedTech experience:**

Zühlke prides itself on helping healthcare organisations leverage modern technologies to deliver ongoing value to patients while driving positive business results.

Recent examples include:

* Zühlke developed and operated the award-winning NHS COVID-19 app which was downloaded over 30 million times, had over 20 million active users, saved over 10K lives, and prevented over 1 million cases, according to independent academic research.
* Zühlke.’s pioneering work with [AO Foundation](https://www.aofoundation.org) demonstrated how AI can improve life for patients and health professionals without compromising patient privacy by using a cutting-edge method called federated learning to improve AI's ability to distinguish bones from other body tissues without sharing private patient data.
* [Sequential Ski](https://www.sequentialskin.com/)n partnered with Zühlke to develop, secure, and scale a personalised skincare mobile app that, along with the Sequential Skin Test Kit, enables users to analyse their skin’s microbiome levels and receive personalised recommendations on suitable skincare regimes and products.

**About Zühlke**

Zühlke is a global innovation partner. We turn big opportunities into working solutions that deliver positive and sustainable value. For people, planet, and profit.

A holistic growth partner to our clients, we close the gaps between strategic ambition, tech implementation, and operational excellence.

Our multidisciplinary teams enable organisations to de-risk strategy and accelerate time to value – in a business environment that’s fluid, data-empowered, and collaborative.

Together, we deliver innovation and transformation initiatives in complex and regulated areas – across diverse industries and ecosystems.

Founded in 2000, Zühlke UK comprises 185 people and is part of a global team of 2,000 colleagues, with headquarters in Switzerland and multiple locations across Europe and Asia.