Chris Cook, IT Director, Nuffield Hospitals

I am writing on behalf of David Mobbs, Chief Executive of Nuffield Hospitals in reply to your letter of 20 December 2005. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

With respect to the study for the Royal Society, it is our view that the current investment in technology in the NHS under the umbrella of the National Programme for IT will benefit patients using independent sector (IS) healthcare providers, be they private patients or NHS patients (for example, using patient choice, as well as patients using NHS facilities. By specifying the standards for patient records, through the NHS Care Record System (NCRS), and by contractually requiring providers of healthcare to the NHS (which most IS providers are) to adhere to these standards, the National Programme will enable joined up healthcare systems for the first time. No longer will patients at IS hospitals be treated without a record of their medical history being available – the IS provider will share the same patient record as the NHS – thus ensuring joined up healthcare and improving patient safety.

The implementation of standard PACS technology, as part of the National Programme for IT, will also provide benefits to IS patients. For example, patients can be put at risk by the requirement to duplicate x-ray and other radiology tests where images cannot be shared between providers. Shared PACS systems will eliminate this.

It should also be acknowledged that, once established, a national care record database will be an extremely valuable data resource for researchers, governments, healthcare companies, pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies.

Our view on where ICT can impact on healthcare generally is purely speculative. However, we would envisage that there are many more benefits to be gained from the use of communications technology, for instance in the remote management and reporting of long term diseases such as diabetes or heart disease.

Certainly we would envisage technology providing the vehicle for commodity based high street-style healthcare products eg laser eye surgery. What will be next – walk-in diagnostics, minor surgery etc? In fact, in our consumer lifestyle–orientated society is likely that the availability of cheaper standard medical technology will be applied to ‘do it yourself’ preventative healthcare. You can check your own cholesterol now – why not DIY ECG?