Modernising Pathology: Proof of concept for new NHS standards to support electronic pathology order communications: work with GP early adopters

A key focus for the NHS CFH Modernising Pathology IT Programme is to ensure that end to end connectivity between Pathology services and health care providers is facilitated through proof of concept of core standards that enable electronic requesting and reporting in relation to NHS pathology services.

The 2006 Carter report states:
"*..End-to-end IT connectivity in pathology, to enable order communications and decision support to be put in place nationally across the different health provider sectors, and to support other demands on pathology such as health protection, disease surveillance and the management of long-term conditions and chronic disease*."

The core standards that have been developed for the Modernising Pathology IT programme are:

1. Use of new HL7v3 messages designed to support the requesting and reporting pathology tests. The current PMIP (Pathology Messaging Implementation Programme) messages support results reporting not requesting and do not utilise the NHS data Spine or its services to enhance data quality, security and sharing of information.
2. Inherent in the use of HL7v3 is the use of SNOMED Clinical Terms (SNOMED CT) to code clinical information where appropriate to support audit and sharing of information via the NHS spine and associated services.
3. The establishment and use of a national catalogue of pathology test requests validated for use across the NHS. A version of this formulary has been created, it is named the National Laboratory Medicine Catalogue (NLMC) and its content is hosted and reviewed by the Royal College of Pathologists on behalf of the NHS.

The proof of concept for the above standards is being conducted by the Modernising Pathology IT programme team in the primary care sector in collaboration with two NHS GP early adopter partners.

The early adopter projects will introduce electronic pathology test requesting into primary care, delivering key benefits to GP's, patients and Pathology services. The proof of concept includes the implementation of the above standards into a real-life NHS scenario of electronic requesting from GP systems to pathology service laboratory management information systems (LIMS) and results being sent electronically from the LIMS back to the GP system. It utilises the existing NHS investments in Information systems in Primary Care, Pathology and the National Spine Infrastructure.

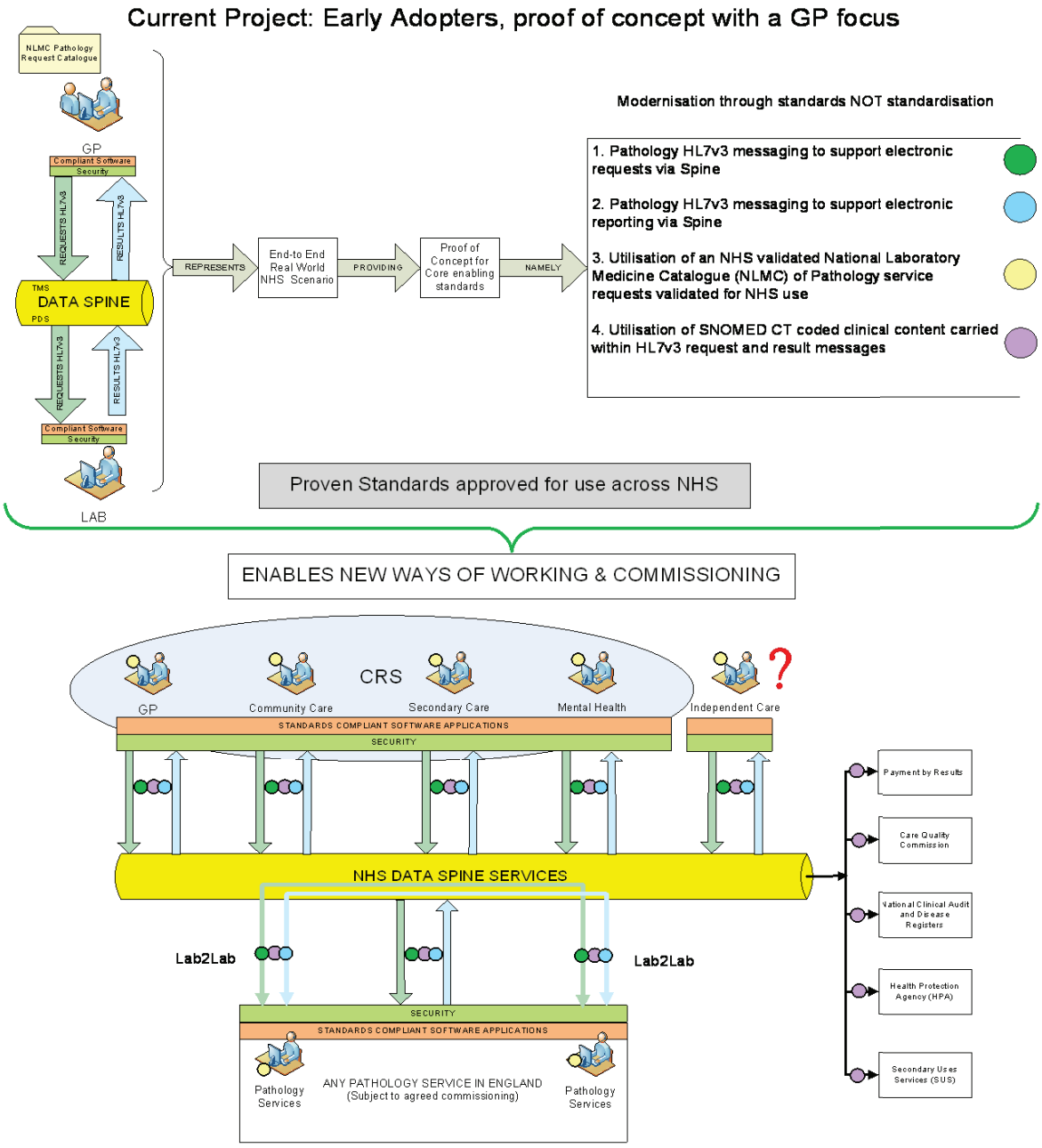
The pathology programme team is working closely with both GP systems and laboratory system suppliers to upgrade their existing system software so that they are able to support the use of the new HL7v3 order and result messages and can utilise the NLMC.

This is a challenging environment for all involved but whilst less rigorous testing scenarios may have been feasible, none would ensure the kind of real life end-to-end assessments required to ensure the standards are fit for use and can be safely implemented. This has also facilitated opportunities to look at the overall work processes and design some preliminary guidance relating to decision support around such processes as specimen collection. The target date for the go-live of the early adopter solutions is Summer/Autumn 2010.

Once proof of concept has been established the standards can be formally approved for use across the NHS at which time they become applicable and relevant to connectivity, interoperability and information sharing in a much wider context than just primary care as illustrated in Figure 1.

The team continues to work with key early adopter stakeholders to agree benefits and how these will be realised to support a standard benefits realisation template for a phased full roll-out of the standards compliant, order communications solutions. It is expected that further early adopters will be identified by taking advantage of the expanded subject matter expert base available through related implementations such as those of Lorenzo and Cerner Millennium.

For further information visit
http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/pathology/modernising
With any questions please email pathology.enquiries@nhs.net



Note: to receive a larger version of the diagram above please email pathology.enquiries@nhs.net