

Vaccine Passports in NHS app unethical if they don't allow data custodianship say FarmaTrust

May 10, 2021 by FarmaTrust

Blockchain, not the NHS app, is the obvious overlooked answer to security and custodianship

London, May 10, 2021: FarmaTrust, the UK-based global medical supply chain data management provider – has warned that the UK is heading very rapidly down the wrong direction with vaccine passports. The Government last week announced its intention to use the NHS app to provide proof of COVID vaccination status – yet both these solutions are not utilising innovative new technologies to protect individuals, and their data. This is particularly important as the public needs comfort in respect of certification or vaccination apps, and concerns on access to individual's health data.

Instead, Raja Sharif, CEO of FarmaTrust, is imploring the Government to relook at a solution that gives full custodianship to the individual, but one that also ensures the immutability of results. *“The Government should look firstly at what has worked, so in Israel, the only country to currently be running a usable passport solution, you see a system that runs on blockchain – which is by definition interoperable and immutable, achieving the first objective of the passport.”*

Sharif believes the UK should go further and build into its platform an option for the consumer to specify by who, where and how their data can be used. Essentially, meaning the consumer gives permission to anyone that uses their vaccine passport data. *“I think many people worry about who is reading their data, where it is stored and what it's stored for. We already have the tools to overcome this if we pick the right approach. And in fact, we have ourselves offered to implement an existing system which would provide the required custodianship. But we are yet to hear back”.*

The big problem with using a conventional in-app approach is that once a vaccine passport has been scanned the data is at risk of being stored or transferred to third party and all without the knowledge of the consumer. Sharif continued, *“these might just sound like technical nuances, but the choice of technology used has very real civil liberties and data control issues. While most agree on the need for a vaccine passport, I don't believe we should suspend all the usual checks and balances on data and liberty - especially when we don't have to.”*

Most concerning for the UK taxpayer is the prospective cost of updating the NHS application, which was never designed with a vaccine passport certification system in mind. Sharif added, *“putting aside liberty issues, we might well see very long delays before any update can come into to effect. It’s going to be extremely expensive, and ultimately – since this has never been done before – there is the very real question of whether this will actually be a workable solution. As a British company with an existing, tried and tested solution, I do also believe we should be supporting our most innovative companies – it just seems like a faster and more cost-effective win for everyone. I have written several letters to try and both offer a solution, and to understand the approach they are taking. It’s another procurement process shrouded in secrecy. However, as with most innovation, an open book approach with collaboration nearly always delivers a better result. I think we should welcome more debate and input from industry.”*