

CHIP

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Part of

WRITING THE FUTURE

Writing the Future, the world's largest health short story prize, is brought to you by Kaleidoscope Health & Care.

Inspired by science fiction, entries considered how health and healthcare in the UK will look in the year 2100.

The prize was won by Elizabeth Ingram-Wallace with her story 'Opsnizing Dad', and was published along with the five other shortlisted stories in October 2017.

At a time of reflecting on where healthcare has been, a further set of longlisted stories was published in the summer of 2018 to coincide with the NHS's 70th birthday.

All of the published stories are available on the Kaleidoscope website, along with the option to buy a limited edition hard copy of the six shortlisted stories.

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**The future is...
currently
terrifying but
never devoid
of hope**

It was now 12 years since the UK adopted the Compulsory Health Implant Programme (CHIP), the most radical change to the health service since the inception of the NHS. The benefits were continually extolled by the government and the media, skepticism still rife throughout various factions of society. For the vast majority of the population the decision of whether to accept the implant had been made. For one group any new evidence on either side of the long-running debate felt more important, expectant parents.

Devised in Scandinavia the programme was implemented in Norway and Sweden at the start of 2070, other countries around the world bought into the idea and the UK officially launched CHIP in 2088. The implant consisted of a small processing unit capable of monitoring and analysing thousands of aspects of the host's well-being. Twelve nanobots were initially housed in the implant, once inserted into the body the bots set out on their pre-determined circuits around the body, collecting microscopic samples of blood and tissue to take back to the unit for analysis. Basic daily reports were sent to the host (a term hated by those opposed to CHIP) via the official app. These were often accompanied by advice notifications such as 'You seem a little dehydrated, please drink more fluids' or 'You are over the legal alcohol limit, please do

not drive'. Detailed reports and alerts were transmitted to Nilsen Wellbeing Limited, the company employed by the government to analyse the data captured and contact local GPs or hospitals should the need arise.

Lucy and Ben Whittle were nearing decision time. The Lunqvist Laws had to be accepted and adhered to by any country wishing to implement a CHIP, a main component of these was the statement: 'Whilst the programme is compulsory it cannot be forced upon people, therefore there must be sufficient provision made by a government to cater for those citizens wishing to opt out'. This provision, for most countries, came in the form of an outpost, a colony away from the mainland where citizens who are not 'chipped' could live and work. Residents of these areas were made to pay higher taxes to account for the additional healthcare they would, according to the government, certainly need. For citizens of the UK the chosen destinations were Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. Both Lucy and Ben had been under 16 years old in 2088 meaning their parents made the decision regarding their implants, now it was their turn. At 26 and 24 years old they had to choose between uprooting, leaving their friends, families and careers behind to protect their child from a programme they both disagreed with or allowing her to be implanted.

“Can we afford not to?” Lucy replied in response to Ben questioning the financial implications of the move. “We know the statistics are lies, no matter what the government say, there’s so many examples of people dying with no warning. And the only people with access to the raw data are those who make money from its success. The government and Nilsen’s need this programme to seem flawless but we know it’s far from that and we can’t risk our baby’s life.” Ben was struggling, he agreed, he was as skeptical as Lucy about CHIP, he didn’t want their daughter to have the implant but knew what that meant. Although they had been saving to have a family in the future, the pregnancy had come about sooner than planned. “Everything is so much more expensive over there, we’d have to start again and we’d be alone. None of your family will move after the implant detected your Uncle Olly’s cancer and my family have been brainwashed from the start, they didn’t even question my dad’s rapid deterioration before his death. That was in no way normal but they accepted it.” Lucy could see the sadness and fear in his eyes, she hated the fact that CHIP had made this moment part of so many pregnancies. Choosing what is best for your unborn child had always been difficult but now it was like a public test. The government was forcing people to make a choice under the pressure of society’s gaze. Knowing that whatever direction you choose you will

be chastised and judged, sometimes verbally, often silently.

Every aspect of life displayed official statements and testimonials, so many lives saved and improved by the implant, a complete success. Beamed onto billboards, shown in the ad space of virtual reality headsets, spread across the internet. The people in charge wanted and needed the public to buy into the project and had no limit of resources to make that happen. Those opposed to CHIP had less influence but just as much determination. The reasons for opposition were many, religious groups believing the unnatural implant interfered with the work of God, people suspicious of what the government and Nilsen's did with the personal data collected, there were those who simply did not want a machine regulating their body and even groups who thought the government were able to control CHIP hosts. Initially these groups worked independently, trying to get a scoop of their own but after a few years they all came together to create NOCHIP, sharing stories and money, working to get information to expose the programme. They believed that if they could get the tide to turn, for more people to reject than accept the implant, then this 'healthcare façade' could be dismantled.

Ben and Lucy spent hours pouring over the anti-CHIP articles, seeing how many suspicious deaths has been glossed over, hearing from the doctors who now lived and worked in Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands having shunned the large salary available in mainland UK due to doubts over CHIP. Their minds had been made up, not only did they want their child not to be ‘chipped’, they also wanted theirs removed. Removal of the implant was illegal unless performed via an expensive government scheme. Thankfully NOCHIP had their own scheme whereby donations were made to help those wanting the implant removal procedure. They applied for financial aid and informed the government of their decisions.

“So, in order to give our daughter the safest start in life we both have to undergo expensive medical procedures, quit our jobs, say goodbye to all our friends and family, move thousands of miles, find work, somewhere to live and pay extortionate taxes.

Aneurin Bevan would be devastated to see the health system he launched become such a corporate machine which tears families apart” ranted Ben as he sorted through the sentimental stash of mementos he kept under the bed. Lucy scanned around the rapidly emptying house, their removal procedures were next week and their flight to Gibraltar four days later. The

familiar bleep of the CHIP app went off in Ben's pocket, "Yes, I know my blood pressure is up, what do you expect...?" he muttered as he grabbed the device and unlocked the screen ready for his daily message. Suddenly his face changed. "What is it?" enquired Lucy. Ben held up the machine, it was an alert from Dr. Myers, their family doctor, which read 'Please contact me as soon as you can, abnormalities detected in your report, tests urgently required'. After a moment of silence in which they exchanged glances Lucy blurted out "It's a scam, it's got to be, a few days after we tell them that we want our implants out this comes through". Ben didn't know what to say, he wouldn't put it past Nilsen's to create deliberate uncertainty like this but he did have faith in Dr. Myers. "I'll give her a call, she'll be able to check things, she'll let me know the truth, won't she?" Lucy slowly nodded; she had the same juxtaposition of trusting her doctor but distrusting those who employ her.

Dr. Myers had been expecting the call, she'd known Ben his whole life, knew how he was likely to react to her message. "Thank you for getting back to me so soon, I'll get straight to the point. I don't want to alarm you too much but your reports over the past week have shown increasing levels of brain cell depletion. You may be aware that early- onset dementia has

been affecting people at a younger age over the past decade. The good news is that your implant has detected this which will allow us to begin treatment straight away. It is a lengthy process with no guarantee of success but you stand a much better chance of reversing the process now than you did just a few years ago.” She patiently answered Ben’s queries about the procedures available and all of the potential outcomes until he seemed to fully comprehend the situation. As she hung up she sighed, shamefully shook her head and closed the government document on her screen, ‘How to Change the Mind of Those Requesting a Removal Procedure’.

About the author

I'm Andy Alcock, 34-years-old and have never entered a writing competition previously. I live in County Durham with my amazing wife, Lisa, and young daughters Daisy and Molly. My creative outlet is usually designing weird and wonderful stuff, creating patterns/images to sell on my Redbubble store. I watch a lot of world cinema films, listen to music which no-one else seems to like (you should all be fans of Eastern European Ska-Punk) and I support Sunderland AFC, which is very hard work.

Inspiration

I entered this competition as it was such an open and interesting brief, a chance to communicate future hopes/fears with no real limits.