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IF THE NHS WANTS TO FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SERVICE, IT SHOULD EMBRACE LEAN PASSIONATELY AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE HEALTH SERVICE -

That's the prescription from leading UK businessman John Neill to a conference of healthcare specialists on Monday June 25.

Mr Neill, Chief Executive Officer of Unipart Group, was discussing lean techniques – like those first developed by Toyota, the world's most efficient car manufacturer - and how they can help the NHS.

He told the Warwickshire conference, organised by lean guru Professor Dan Jones, that transformation of the NHS has got to start with culture change.

Mr Neill said: "When people ask what the NHS can learn from Toyota the immediately expect to hear about the tools and techniques applied outside manufacturing.

"But frankly it isn't simply about the tools and techniques it's mainly about philosophy and culture.

"This is particularly relevant in light of reports last week that the NHS Confederation says the health service should follow the example of other organisations including John Lewis and British Telecom in focusing on customer service.

"But you can't focus on customer service when your organisation is choked by activity that doesn't add value for the customer. You can't expect people to deliver more than the customer expects when they don't have the right tools to solve problems and eliminate waste.

"You can't expect a hospital to deal with more and more patients every year just because you've told people to work faster.

"If the NHS wants to focus on customer service it should embrace lean passionately at every level of the health service. That is the only way to enable people to have the time, confidence and skills to deliver more than the customer expects.

"It is not about learning a few tools. It is about creating a culture that comprehensively seeks to make continuous improvements everywhere, every day."

Mr Neill added that Unipart has devoted the past twenty years to refining and developing lean principles into a codified architecture that extends their use into every aspect of business life.

Known as the Unipart Way, the management system is currently being introduced by a major Government department as well as a global insurance company and a multinational manufacturer by Unipart experts.

Notes to editors

1/ Full text of speech available on request

2/ Unipart Group employs more than 9000 worldwide and has an annual turnover of more than £1billion.

As well as being the UK's largest independent supplier of car and truck parts, bodyshop parts and workshop consumables through its Unipart Automotive division, Unipart Group is a major force in logistics for blue-chip customers.

The Unipart Logistics division provides technology logistics for Vodafone UK, 3 and BSkyB, retail logistics for Halfords, Jessops and Homebase and aerospace logistics for Airbus as well as managing worldwide logistics for all Jaguar aftermarket parts.

Unipart also offers expert consultancy in implementing lean principles across a variety of industry sectors as well as supply chain specific expertise.

3/ All media inquiries to Mark Howard. Tel 01865 383440 or 07717 542953 or visit www.unipart.co.uk