
The Power of Information: Putting all of us in Control of the Health and Care Information we Need



Using information and technology to put people in greater control of their health and care is at the heart of the UK Government's strategy – The power of information – announced today.

More data about NHS and social care services is being published to support the public in making meaningful choices based on things like success rates for treatment and infection control. Building on open data already published on NHS Choices and bringing together health and care information from across the internet, a new online portal will give people access to trusted health and care information, wherever it was created.

The Information Strategy for health and care also opens up information to consumer groups and IT specialists outside the NHS so they can produce tailored websites and apps for different patients. By providing NHS and care information to creative experts the government expects to see new products and services being offered to patients.

Further key elements of 'The power of information' will make using the NHS easier for patients by providing online access to many of the most frustrating interactions people have with the NHS such as booking appointments. By 2015 patients will be able to book their GP appointments online, helping to end the '8am rush' for booking GP appointments on the phone. Online services will include:

- Repeat prescriptions will be available online, speeding them up and increasing convenience for the millions of patients who need them.
- Test results will be made available online, ending the wait for a letter in the post.
- Patients' medical records will be available securely to them online so they can be viewed and referred to easily by patients and shared with anyone they choose to. By 2015 all patients registered with a GP in England will be able to see their medical records online.
- And in future it will be possible to contact GP surgeries by email, ending the hassle of calling switchboards and trying to find the right person to speak to. So routine tasks that GPs have to do at the moment – like issuing sick notes – will be a lot faster and easier for everyone in future.

The momentum for these changes will be locally-led and include working closely with the voluntary sector to support the needs of those who might not be able to use the web, or have a smartphone or a computer. This involves a full commitment to preserving face-to-face contact with health and care professionals as an essential, core part of care, while simplifying services for most people.

Rather than telling nurses and doctors what Information Technology they need to improve care, the Government is supporting local doctors, and nurses to decide what they need and to use imaginative solutions – such as remote monitoring of patients with long term conditions – to help them manage their health.

The Royal College of GPs has agreed to work in partnership with patient groups and other professional organisations to lead work on supporting people to access services and their records electronically. From 2013 the NHS Commissioning Board will be asked to work with the RCGP to promote this work. As the case studies in the print and online versions amply demonstrate, successful innovation is being driven at a local level, led by nurses and doctors who see how technology can improve care.

All patients will be able to give immediate feedback, in ways that are convenient to them, at any encounter they have with a health or care service. This will drive improvements in quality, as well as making services more responsive to the people using them.

In addition, the Government's ambition is for all care homes to use barcode medication in the future. Barcoding medication greatly improves patient safety by reducing the number of prescribing errors, which can sometimes be fatal. A number of pilots are being established to determine how this can best happen.

And midwives' time will be freed up to allow them to focus on caring for mothers-to-be. The Department will work to support the NHS to ensure that maternity services benefit from the latest technology. For example, in Portsmouth midwives now use low cost digital pens to write up case notes – this information is then automatically uploaded onto the patient's electronic record. This has halved their paper work and the patient's hospital gets the latest information instantly.

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