

# more choice & control over your healthcare





## Vision for the future

Having more choice and control over your own health and care is at the very heart of the Government's vision for the National Health Service (NHS) in England. It will mean major changes for the NHS and bring benefits both to you and to those who work in the NHS.

This leaflet describes the changes and the benefits that computers and information technology will create through the work of the National Programme for IT.

Over the next ten years, modern computer systems, fit for the twenty first century, will be installed in the NHS. Once the work has been completed, these systems will connect more than 100,000 doctors, 380,000 nurses and 50,000 other health professionals in England.

It will also give England's 50 million+ patients easier access to their own health and care information, with each person having their own electronic NHS Care Record.





## Why is change necessary?

The NHS is providing more care than ever before. The care available is becoming increasingly complex and specialised. It is often provided to you by teams working across a number of organisations. Ensuring you, and those you wish to care for you, have access to accurate, up-to-date information will enable you to receive the best possible care. Access to your NHS Care Record will be strictly limited to those who need this information to provide your treatment and care.

Although most GP surgeries, trusts and healthcare communities already store patient information on computer systems, these systems are not linked nationally. This means your health record cannot be accessed easily and there is currently no national means to transfer your health and care information efficiently, securely and confidentially from one NHS organisation to another.

The National Programme for Information Technology will address these issues.





## What will the changes mean?

- your health and care information will be stored and updated electronically with important safeguards to protect your confidentiality and hold your information as securely as possible
- you will have increased choice over your care; who provides it; when and where
- making a hospital appointment at a time, date and place to suit you will be faster and easier. You will be able to choose and book the appointment whilst at your GP surgery - or later via a call centre or the Internet, if you prefer to discuss it with family, carers or colleagues first
- whether your treatment is planned or unexpected, you and those you ask to care for you will be able to access your NHS Care Record 24 hours a day, seven days a week





- the care provided for you will be safer because vital information for your diagnosis and treatment (such as current medication, details of previous operations, test results or allergies) will be available whether you require care in your home area or at an NHS site elsewhere in England
- access to your NHS Care Record by authorised health and care professionals will involve a number of security checks and will be on a 'need to know' basis. For example, a clinician will be able to access more detailed information than a member of administrative staff
- you will eventually have secure access to your electronic NHS Care Record via the Internet
- it will not always be necessary for you to visit your GP surgery before collecting repeat prescriptions from your local pharmacy.

The following pages describe these changes in more detail.





## A new health record for all

A new, electronic NHS Care Record will be created for every patient in England. Initially, this will enable your information to be shared between the health organisations that provide care for you. Eventually, you will have access to your own personal records at any time via the Internet.

State-of-the-art protection and authorisation procedures will be built in to safeguard your record against breaches of security and computer system failures. This will help to ensure that only you and those involved in your care will be able to access or update your NHS Care Record in a form that identifies you. You will be able to say that you do not want to have your record shared at all, although this could affect the quality of your care.

Once the new systems are complete, you will also be able to request that certain parts of your record are not shared, unless in particular circumstances - such as an emergency.





## Helping you to make choices about your health and care

The new way of storing and sharing information will allow you to access information more easily when making decisions about your health and care. For example, you will have faster access to your record by using a secure Internet connection than is possible by requesting a paper copy.

Diagnosis and treatment will also be safer and speedier, because those caring for you will have the right information available to them at the right time. That information will include X-rays and other medical images. These will be stored electronically so they can be easily made available at different locations. If required, they can also be forwarded to specialists for advice on your care.

This new technology will bring advantages over paper records and X-ray films which are still used in many parts of the NHS and can be lost, difficult to read, or locked in a filing cabinet and inaccessible when they are needed. The electronic system will also record details of everyone who has accessed your NHS Care Record. This is not possible with paper records.





## An easier way to book hospital appointments

Once you and your GP have decided on the right care for you, the new technology being installed will make it possible for you to select hospital appointments from a choice of those available at a time, date and place to suit you. You will be able to choose and book the appointment whilst at your GP surgery - or later via a call centre or the Internet, if you prefer to discuss it with family, carers or colleagues first.

This summer (2004) GPs in some areas will begin to book appointments with local hospitals electronically. If you are in one of those areas, a leaflet explaining electronic booking will be available.





## Safer, more convenient prescribing

Once the systems are in place, it will not always be necessary for you to visit your GP surgery before collecting repeat prescriptions from your pharmacy.

Your GP, or other prescriber, will be able to send prescriptions electronically to the pharmacy, so safety will be improved as, in most cases, prescription information will not be handwritten or typed more than once.

Prescribing will also be monitored to help ensure that clinicians are alerted to conflicting medicines which could trigger an unwanted reaction.





## When will the changes take place?

The Government's National Programme for Information Technology in the NHS is a multi-billion pound programme which will turn the vision into a reality by 2010. Work is already underway. New computer systems and services will be phased in gradually throughout the NHS in England.

This will begin in some areas during summer 2004. You may not notice any immediate differences, but you will be kept informed of developments as they happen. When any changes take place which could affect you, you will receive information to explain this and the choices you can make.





## Making it work

The changes taking place are complex, on a massive scale and involve the whole of the NHS. They will be introduced carefully and in stages. They are about more than installing new computer systems. They will bring about a new relationship between you and the people caring for you. As a result, you will gain more choice and control over your health and care. As with all major projects, there will be difficulties to deal with along the way. We will do our best to keep you informed and involved as this work unfolds.

The changes and their benefits are far reaching and vital, both for a healthy future for you and for the NHS.





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