eHealth – using computers to improve your healthcare

What is eHealth?

eHealth means using computers and new technology to improve your healthcare. When your health information is held on computer, it is easier for NHS staff who look after you to get information about you quickly. This helps them give you the best possible care.

What does eHealth mean for me?

Doctors can check your **x-rays** and **test results** on computer. This means they can look at the results as soon as they are available, so your treatment can start sooner.

If your GP wants to refer you to a **hospital** and you agree, they will send the hospital information about your health in electronic form. After treatment, the hospital will send information to your GP electronically or by post.

If you live in a remote or rural area, using **video links** to communicate with health professionals can make it easier for you to get the care you need.

If an **ambulance** takes you to hospital, the ambulance workers can send information about you electronically, so the hospital staff can get ready to treat you.

You can get information from the NHS health information website, **NHS inform**. It tells you about illnesses and conditions, local services, and support groups.

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How is eHealth changing the way my personal information is stored and shared?

- Your GP practice and any other clinics or hospitals you have used will still keep records about your health, but most records are now held on computer instead of on paper.
- Your GP keeps a full record about your health. Most people in Scotland also have an Emergency Care Summary, which is copied from your GP's computer system. This contains basic information about you and your health:
  - your name and address
  - your date of birth
  - medicines your GP has prescribed
  - any bad reactions you've had to medicines.
- If you need urgent medical care when your GP practice is closed, health professionals at NHS 24 or a local out of hours medical centre can look at your Emergency Care Summary, if you agree to this. If you are unconscious or unable to give agreement, they may need to read your care summary without asking you first. This is to give you the best possible care.
- You can ask your GP to let you see your Emergency Care Summary.

Long term conditions

- If you have a medical condition which will continue for a long time (like asthma, diabetes, kidney disease or heart disease), you may be able to choose to have a health record which is shared by all NHS staff involved in your care.
- This means all the people involved in your care can get up-to-date information about your health and treatment and can add information to your record.
- Your GP will tell you if it is possible to have a shared record.

What will happen in the future?

- Instead of creating a single electronic record for every patient, containing all their health information, the NHS in Scotland plans to link up the computer systems that are already in use.
- Information will be stored in different computer systems (for example GP, hospital, x-ray department) but health professionals will be able to connect to them and see the information they need.
- They will only be able to look at the information they need to care for you.
- Health professionals will be able to find your information more quickly and easily than by looking at paper records.

What else might change?

- You will be able to choose to have more information in your Emergency Care Summary.
- If you agree, NHS staff may be allowed to look at your Emergency Care Summary in non-emergencies, for example when you have a planned stay in hospital.
- You may be able to do things online like:
  - look at parts of your health record
  - make appointments
  - order repeat prescriptions
  - record and track blood pressure, or
  - check test results.
- Most personal health information will be held in electronic not paper files.

Is my information safe?

The NHS must keep your personal information safe and confidential. The NHS makes sure their computer systems have high levels of security so that only people who are allowed to look at your information can do so. The NHS also makes sure all NHS staff are properly trained in confidentiality and security.

Any member of staff who looks at your information must:

- only look at the information they need to give you care and treatment
- agree to keep your information private
- only use or record the information they need
- be trained in how to use the computer system properly, and
- use a password.

The NHS regularly checks who has looked at personal information held electronically.

What rights do I have about my personal health information?

You have the right to:

- confidentiality. Information about you should only be shared with people who need it to care for you or treat you. The leaflet **Confidentiality – it's your right** explains this
- know how your personal health information will be used, stored and shared
- choose not to have an Emergency Care Summary or a more detailed information summary
- see or get a copy of your health information. The leaflet **How to see your health records** explains how to do this, and
- ask for any mistakes in your health information to be corrected.

Everyone registered with a GP in Scotland has a number that the NHS uses to identify them. This number, called a CHI number, is used on your health records and makes sure that your information is not mixed up with anyone else's.

How to find out more

If you would like more information about how your information is stored or shared, please contact:

- a member of NHS staff involved in your care
- the NHS inform Helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone **18001 0800 22 44 88**). Calls to the helpline are free and it can provide an interpreting service, or

- your local citizens advice bureau (find your nearest bureau on the internet at **www.cas.org.uk** or in your local phone book).

For more information about your health rights, and to get the leaflets mentioned, please visit:

- www.hris.org.uk
- www.nhsinform.co.uk

For more information about eHealth, visit:

- www.ehealth.scot.nhs.uk
- www.sct.scot.nhs.uk

To find out how your personal information is used and protected, contact:

The Information Commissioner's Office – Scotland

93-95 Hanover Street

Edinburgh EH2 1DJ

phone: 0131 301 5071

email: Scotland@ico.gsi.gov.uk

website: www.ico.gov.uk

To ask for this information in another format or language, email ask@hris.org.uk

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