

NHS Direct and GPs get connected

New link supports seamless patient care

Issue date 29.01.2002

2002/0104

A new e-link that makes it easier for NHS Direct and out-of-hours services to share patient information with GP practices will be launched at a special event at BMA House, Tavistock Square, London, on Friday (February 1), the NHS Information Authority has announced.

E-envoy Andrew Pinder will be the key note speaker at the event, which will introduce the new system developed by Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health community as part of the NHS Information Authority's programme to support development of a national online health record. A live demonstration will follow.

Graham Obeney, Project Chairman said: "This is a real breakthrough. At the moment GPs rarely get to know when their patients contact NHS Direct. Now, providing the patient gives his or her consent, an electronic message can be sent to the GP's computer system and entered automatically on the patient's record, giving a true picture of what has happened to the patient."

Information will include the patient's address, telephone number and GP, the date and time of contact, the problem details, who took the call and if it was passed for advice or a visit.

In return NHS Direct and the out-of-hours service will receive information from the GP providing details of any further consultations with the patient.

Initially set to go live in Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth, the new clinical messaging system will operate on NHSnet, the NHS's private network. It will connect NHS Direct and GP co-ops, operating from different call centres, with over 200 GPs working from 34 practices in four health authorities.

Graham Obeney, commented: "Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth has used electronic messaging to share patient details with the out-of-hours services since 1996. In that time 300,000 messages have been recorded saving huge amounts of administrative resources, which can be deployed elsewhere. We realised that applying this to NHS Direct could have equal impact and is a real example of the benefits to be gained from sharing information."

Potential future developments include a system to allow patients to book an appointment with their GP practices via NHS Direct.

Patient information sent electronically is protected by encryption and digital signature to ensure security and confidentiality.

Alan Purcell, from the Information Authority, said: "We are very pleased with the progress made by Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth. Connecting NHS Direct and out-of-hours services with GP practices is a positive step towards developing an electronic health record."

Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth is one of 16 health communities taking part in a two-year electronic health record programme for the NHS Information Authority.

Ends

Notes for Editors:

1. The NHS Information Authority is managing a national co-ordination programme to support the NHS in addressing the electronic record aspects of Information for Health through a cohesive programme, which demonstrates implementation issues through selected communities, evaluates outputs and define emerging concepts.
2. Links between NHS Direct, out-of-hours services and GPs in Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth conform to eGif (Government Interoperability Framework) requirements, and use XML and PKI.
3. The system is supplied by GePmail and has interfaces with all major GP systems (see www.gepmail.co.uk).
4. For more information contact Miles Gray at the NHS Information Authority on 0208 845 6600 or 07979 757240, email miles.gray@nhsia.nhs.uk