

Patient records to go

A GP has devised software that sends patients' notes securely, direct from the out of hours co-op to your practice computer **By Sarah Wild**

GPs cannot be on call all day, every day, and must sometimes depend on other people to treat their patients.

But relying on clinical feedback about patients from the out of hours co-operative or deputising service can sometimes compromise continuity of care. For example, notes sent by fax are expensive and can often be illegible, or go astray.

The solution to this problem may be GP Mail, a software package which transmits patients' notes direct from the out of hours co-operative to the practice.

The designer of the software, Wimbledon GP Dr Paul Cundy, says: 'The beauty of it is that notes are exported from GP Mail straight into the practice's clinical software, providing paperless exchange of records. The GP receives a legible, coded and retrievable record on screen.'

The package will also prevent practices from missing out on their item-of-service claims. If there is a claimable fee, GP Mail will automatically post and complete a *might your claim require for the practice?* the partnership then has to do is submit the fee claim to the health authority.

Who will benefit?

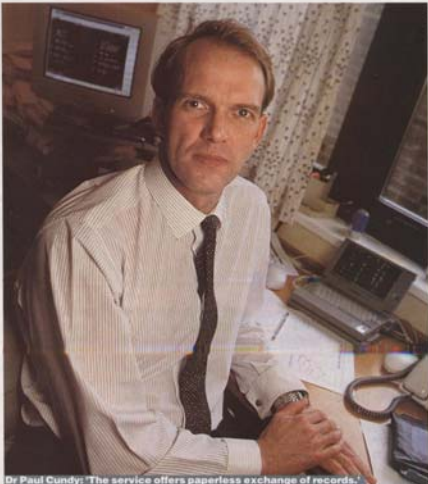
In addition to the gains for the practice, as stated above, patients can be reassured that notes are passed direct to their GP. The co-operative is also saved the chore of continually faxing data to practices.

Another advantage is that co-operatives do not need to employ somebody to transcribe on-call instructions. Practices can simply complete a template, which is transmitted straight to the co-operative.

Details go straight from one screen to another, so there is no chance of transcription errors. Other templates can include specific messages about individual patients; for example, a GP might ask to be contacted if a call is received from a patient who is suffering from a terminal illness.

How secure is the system?

The package incorporates a range of security measures, including encryption using remotely managed keys, and tamperproof



Dr Paul Cundy: 'The service offers paperless exchange of records.'

address lists. GP Mail has also been approved for use via the NHS net.

Who can use the service?

Any co-operative or deputising service using Adastra software can link to GP Mail. Practices need Outlook 98 or 2000 and the service links to Meditel, Torex and Emis systems. Other interfaces are being developed. You may not need an engineer to install GP Mail, and any practice which has an email account can use the service.

Has it been tested?

Yes. The service has been in use on a daily basis since October 1996. Approximately

40 practices, based mainly in south-east England, currently use it. GP Mail is also now a mandatory interface for NHS Direct software suppliers. Any practice covered by NHS Direct pilot sites would be able to receive records via GP Mail.

How much does it cost?

The GP Mail service costs £500 a year and includes software, unlimited upgrades and access to the system's helpdesk. ■



INFORMATION

If you would like to find out more about the GP Mail system, contact the service on 01403 216904.