

Publications approval reference: 001559

To: Royal College of Emergency Medicine,
To: Royal College of Physicians
To: Royal College of Nursing
To: Academy of Royal Medical Colleges
To: Royal Society of Medicine
To: Royal College of Nursing
To: HealthWatch
To: CQC

24 April 2020

Dear Colleague

RE: COVID-19: Increased Patient Information for health and care professionals.

To help the NHS to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, NHSX and NHS Digital are improving the access that doctors, nurses and other authorised health and care professionals have to medical records and information. This will help them to more safely treat and advise patients who are not attending their usual GP practice or who have called NHS 111, or who are receiving direct care in another setting. This letter explains the temporary changes being made to GP Connect and to the Summary Care Record to enable this.

How this will be achieved

Faster rollout of GP Connect functionality

[GP Connect](#) allows authorised health and care staff in general practice, NHS 111 and in other care settings providing direct care, to view clinical information from a patient's GP record. It also allows information sharing between different care settings, quickly and efficiently in support of direct care. It also makes booking and sharing of patient appointments simpler. At the moment practices connect to GP Connect service individually. We are turning on additional functionality for all GP practices in England and have requested GP system suppliers to work directly with NHS Digital to achieve this, as below, but will respect opt-outs where patients have made them.

[GP Connect](#) will:

- improve GPs ability to treat patients outside of their registered practice, giving patients easier access to a GP when they need one, regardless of demand or staffing levels in their own practice, for example within a network or a federation hub;

- give authorised health and care professionals working in primary care, NHS 111 - including the COVID Clinical Assessment Service (CCAS) - and other appropriate direct care settings, access to the GP records of the patients they are treating, regardless of where they are registered; and
- allow remote organisations such as NHS 111 to book appointments directly with the patients GP practice including the ability to manage referrals from the COVID Clinical Assessment Service (CCAS). This will enable healthcare professionals to provide more timely care and provide flexibility for the primary care system.

Additional Information in the Summary Care Record

In addition, authorised, registered and regulated health and care professionals across the wider health and care system will have more information available about the patients they are treating, through provision of [Additional Information](#) in the [Summary Care Record \(SCR-AI\)](#). To enable this, we are temporarily removing the requirement to have explicit consent to share the SCR-AI. As a result, this Additional Information will now automatically be included in all patient SCRs unless a patient has expressed a preference not to include it.

The Additional Information will include things like management of long-term conditions, medications, immunisations, care plan information and significant medical history, past and present. Again, opt-outs will be respected where they have been made.

Legal basis for this action

This action is being taken in response to the [Notice](#) issued on 20th March 2020 under Regulation 3(4) of the Health Service Control of Patient Information Regulations 2002 requiring confidential patient information to be shared in the circumstances set out in the Notice. The changes will remain in force during the period of the COVID-19 emergency period as set out in the Notice (unless extended or reduced) at which point systems will return to their current state unless alternative arrangements have been put in place before then.

Safeguards required to keep information safe have not been compromised. NHS access to the SCR and to medical records is traceable and auditable. Only those staff who require access to do their jobs can view this information, and it remains the case that all staff should always seek permission to view an SCR from the patient before doing so.

The BMA and RCGP are supportive of this work, as are the Information Commissioner's Office and the National Data Guardian.

Statements from those bodies together with more information about security, consent, and information governance is available on the following webpage <https://www.nhsx.nhs.uk/covid-19-response/data-and-information-governance/how-data-supporting-covid-19-response/>

These changes will give more doctors, nurses and other health professionals access to the additional information that might help to save lives during these unprecedented times.

If you would like to discuss this further please contact digitalprimarycareengland@nhsx.nhs.uk

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Gould'.

Matthew Gould

CEO
NHSX

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Masood Nazir'.

Dr Masood Nazir

Director for Digital Primary Care
NHSX