

# BENEFITS OF ONLINE ACCESS TO RECORDS

FOR GP PRACTICES  
AND PATIENTS

**Street Lane Practice in Leeds has always tried to involve patients in their own health and believes online record access is the right way forward. As soon as this functionality became available with their software supplier, the GP practice started offering it to their patients.**



"We were getting lots of requests from patients who wanted to view their records", says John Snowden, Deputy Practice Manager. "These consultations last up to 30 minutes per patient and easily took up a few hours per week."

When online access to records became available about eighteen months ago, the practice didn't hesitate to launch it. "After reviewing this new enhancement to our system, the GP partners all agreed on the benefits. By opening up health records online, patients no longer need to come to the practice but can view their records from home. It saves them time and money, and at the same time, it frees up time at the practice for other patients. It's a double bonus."

Dr Jonny Hobman, one of the practice partner GPs, puts it this way: "Patients can request to see their full record anyway. We don't want to hold anything back."

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To get staff on board, the GP practice organised a target training session. "We gathered everyone and explained how it works with print screens and what the benefits are. We even did a few tests with dummy patients to show how easy it was, and we also set up an online protocol, all tied up around ID checks," John explains. "Everybody was OK with it and felt it was straight-forward."

Street Lane Practice decided to launch slow and easy, and opened up about 60 records during the first six months. "We agreed to test full record access with the group of patients who regularly asked to see their files," John explains. "Patients were really interested to see what was in their records. There were no issues reported, although we did receive a couple of comments about understanding the code doctors wrote in and we also had the odd password request."

#### A patient's view

Mike has been a patient at Street Lane Practice for about 35 years. Three years ago he joined the patient forum, where they were

talking about modernising GP services. "When they told me online services were available, I started using them straight away."

Besides the advantage of being able to book appointments online and order his repeat prescriptions, Mike finds online record access particularly useful. "A while ago, the doctor and I had a discussion about statins, so we decided to do a blood test," he says. "Normally, I would have had to ring the practice five days later to find out about the results. Instead, I just went online to see my blood test result and at the same time, I scheduled a phone appointment with the doctor. He called me the next day; we discussed the results and agreed on a way forward. Afterwards I checked my online record to see what the doctor had written down, and it was all accurate. All this happened, and I didn't have to ring or go into the practice at all. It saved both of us a lot of time."

Mike and his wife share each other's files. "We've never noticed anything that wasn't right, but if there was, we could correct it with our GP. That's another advantage."



### Getting patients to sign up

"In an ideal world, we'd get everyone with internet access to use online services," John says. "We do what we can to promote them to our patients including, posters in the waiting room, offering it to new patients upon registration, running it through our patient forum and promoting it at our flu clinic."

When a patient regularly needs blood tests or is suffering from a long term condition (LTC), GPs at Street Lane Practice offer detailed access straight away. "Patients with asthma for instance, can fill in an online questionnaire about their asthma. The GP will view this and leave a comment with further action," John says. "If necessary, the GP can change the medication and have it ready at the pharmacy for the patient to pick up. Online access is not just one-way access, it really works both ways."

This is an important message to all patients. Mike, who promotes online services to other patients, often finds himself reassuring

new patients. "Some people are reluctant as they fear that they will be made to go online or might lose their current methods of access because of the introduction of online services." Mike says. "I explain to them it's not a replacement, but an additional service. People with online access have three extra options to get in touch with their practice."

**Street Lane Practice is a modern GP practice in north Leeds with seven GPs and over 13,000 patients. A total of 2,020 patients have registered for GP online services so far, of which 560 have full record access.**

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