

**PATIENT ONLINE  
SAFE ACCESS TO ONLINE  
RECORDS CASE STUDY**



# **SAFE ACCESS TO ONLINE RECORDS**

**A PRACTICE'S**

**POINT OF VIEW**

Since December last year, Hulme Hall Medical Group in south Manchester has been offering full record access to their 11,000 patients. About 200 of them have requested access and can now see their online records. With a consent form and a robust record checking system in place, the practice is making sure that patients can access the right information about them.



Hulme Hall Medical Group started offering online services back in August 2014. Prompted by practice manager Joanne Revell who previously worked as an IT manager, the practice upgraded their GP system to enable these services. They started by offering online appointment booking and prescription ordering, and now have almost half of their patients signed up for this. “It revolutionised our practice,” says partner GP Steve Hastings. “If you can stop the phones from ringing, even for a minute, by shifting work online, that has to be a good thing.”

#### Start off slowly

When the functionality for online records access became available, Hulme Hall Medical Group began to implement this service too. “It’s not just about turning this option on, it’s about making sure this online service will benefit the patients and how we can get them

**“Patients need to be aware of what it means to have online record access”**



involved in their health,” Joanne says. “We started off slowly by offering it to the twenty members of our patient participation group and to those patients who would really benefit from it. This gave us the time to get used to the system and develop it as we went along.”

Record access is open to everyone who requests it. At Hulme Hall Medical Group, patients are asked to sign a consent form when they would like to start using online services. “Patients need to read this and agree that they are aware of what it means to have online record access,” Joanne explains. “They might see something that will upset them or something that is not quite right. The leaflet we give them explains to contact the practice right away in these cases.” On the last page of the consent leaflet, patients are asked to tick the boxes to confirm that they have understood that they might read something they have forgotten, they might see abnormal test results or bad news before they have spoken to the doctor or at a time they cannot get in touch with their GP and they may come across errors. The leaflet also advises patients to reconsider registering for online services when they are pressured into revealing their

details to someone else. When the form is signed, reception staff will check the patient’s photo ID and sign the consent form too. Once these steps are taken, patients get their login and password to go online for appointments and prescriptions.

Access to their records is granted up to two weeks later. “To manage my entire workload, I need that time to go through the patient’s record to make sure all the codes are correct and that none of the information could be harmful,” Joanne says. “I also manually scan the records and the notes for third party data. If I am unsure of anything, I will check with

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one of the clinicians." At Hulme Hall Medical Group, all clinicians are involved in the screening process, too. "They have all become skilled in checking records for third party data, safeguarding and anxiety issues as well as making sure the problem list is accurate," Steve explains. "All requests are also reviewed by the patient's regular GP and they have the final say before giving access."

### Keep the records clean

The practice takes great care of screening the records. "It's our role as data controllers to make sure the information doesn't cause any harm," Steve, partner GP and the practice's Caldicott lead, says. "If there are safety issues, if we know a patient has health anxiety or if we suspect coercion, as a blanket rule, we don't give access. We will have a conversation with the patient to explain our reasons." So far, the practice has had to have this conversation twice. "In one of the cases, we suspected coercion. This was cleared after we spoke to the patient," Steve recalls.

As soon as patients have access to their records, they are asked to read them carefully

and report any issues. "Patients will expect everything they talked about during the consultation to be in their record," Steve says. "It's a steep learning curve about how we take notes. Medical records are still full of jargon and abbreviations. We will need to be more careful about grammar, spelling and technical terms. For instance, if a patient reads TATT, they won't know it means 'tired all the time' and will call us for more information."

The practice has had a couple of instances where patients felt the information about them was incorrect. "There was a coding error in one of the records, which we rectified after checking with the clinicians," Joanne explains. "One of our patients didn't agree with a diagnosis of hypertension. The patient did have hypertension but wasn't aware the prescribed medication was to manage exactly this." The practice feels that having patients question what is in their records is not a bad thing. "It's an excellent way of tidying up records," Steve says. "By reading about their health, patients become more aware of what's going on and will be more involved with their care. I cannot stress enough how easy switching to online record access has been for us."

### About the practice

Hulme Hall Medical Group is a large practice group with two sites in Handforth and Cheadle Hulme in the south of Manchester. Five partners and two salaried GPs look after 11,000 patients. Nearly 50% of their patients have signed up for online services so far, 200 of them have online access to their full records. The numbers are climbing every month.