

03 April 2018

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London SE1 8UG

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E: nhsi.enquiries@nhs.net
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By email

Dear [REDACTED],

Request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the “FOI Act”)

We refer to your email of **1 March 2018** in which you requested information under the FOI Act from NHS Improvement. Since 1 April 2016, the Patient Safety functions under section 13R of the NHS Act 2006 have been exercised by the NHS Trust Development Authority, as part of the integrated organisation known as NHS Improvement.

Your request

In your initial request email, you asked the following question:

“Please can you provide the number of:

- 1. Incidents recorded related to online prescribing/online doctor services*
- 2. Harms recorded related to online prescribing/online doctor services*
- 3. Deaths recorded related to online prescribing/online doctor service*

Where there is an entry - please provide the detail alongside that, removing anything that would identify any individuals”

NHS Improvement asked you to clarify the search timeframe of your request and, in your email dated 7 March 2018, it was confirmed that you required data covering the last 5 calendar years. In the same email, it was clarified that NHS Improvement only collects incident data relating to NHS funded care and not private organisations, which you acknowledged and accepted. In this email we also pointed out reports related to such services would tend to use the name of the online prescribing service or online doctor service and asked if you wanted any company/service names included in your search, but you confirmed you only wanted our search to use the generic terminology of ‘online’.

Decision

NHS Improvement holds some of the information that you have requested, and has decided to release all of the information that it holds.

The information we hold is from the National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS). By way of background, some information about the NRLS may be helpful. The primary purpose of the NRLS is to enable learning from patient safety incidents occurring in the NHS. The NRLS was established in late 2003 as a largely voluntary scheme for reporting patient safety incidents, and therefore it does not provide the definitive number of patient safety incidents occurring in the NHS.

All NHS organisations in England and Wales have been able to report to the system since 2005. In April 2010, it became mandatory for NHS organisations to report all patient safety incidents which result in severe harm or death. All patient safety incident reports submitted to the NRLS categorised as resulting in severe harm or death are individually reviewed by clinicians to make sure that we learn as much as we can from these incidents, and, if appropriate, take action at a national level.

The NRLS is a dynamic reporting system, and the number of incidents reported as occurring at any point in time may increase as more incidents are reported. Experience in other industries has shown that as an organisation's reporting culture matures, staff become more likely to report incidents. Therefore, an increase in incident reporting should not be taken as an indication of worsening of patient safety, but rather as an increasing level of awareness of safety issues amongst healthcare professionals and a more open and transparent culture across the organisation.

A search of the NRLS was carried out on 16 March 2018 of all incidents reported as occurring between 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2017, exported to the NRLS by 13 March 2018 and where the free text description of the incident contained the requested phrases. We constructed this search using the terms below:

"Online doc, online dr, online doctor, online prescri*, web (based) doc, web (based) dr, web (based) doctor, web based prescri*, internet doc, internet dr, internet doctor, internet prescri*, prescri* (within 2 word proximity to) online, prescri* (within 2 word proximity to) internet."

The agreed key search phrases will pick up many appropriate incidents, however, we cannot guarantee that there are not additional relevant incidents that an alternative keyword search strategy might not have found. It will also pick incidents that may not have been what you were seeking, either because of the context in which the search terms you requested are used (e.g. 'online prescribing training' in context suggesting the training rather than the prescribing is online) or because staff submitting the reports use the term 'online prescription' in a broad sense (e.g. to distinguish between local computer-based patient records of medication and paper or card-based medication records).

Table 1. Total number of reported incidents with keywords including online or synonyms plus doctor or prescribing and synonyms by reported degree of harm and year.

Reported degree of harm	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
No Harm	17	17	27	45	48	154
Low	2	0	3	10	4	19
Moderate	0	0	1	1	1	3
Severe	0	0	0	0	0	0
Death	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	19	17	31	56	53	176

Table 1 shows the aggregate level data relating to questions 1, 2 and 3, whilst **Annex 1**, at the end of this response, provides the free text of the 176 patient safety incident reports, redacted where any person-identifiable details had been included by the original reporter.

Review rights

If you consider that your request for information has not been properly handled or if you are otherwise dissatisfied with the outcome of your request, you can try to resolve this informally with the person who dealt with your request. If you remain dissatisfied, you may seek an internal review within NHS Improvement of the issue or the decision. A senior member of NHS Improvement's staff, who has not previously been involved with your request, will undertake that review.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of any internal review, you may complain to the Information Commissioner for a decision on whether your request for information has been dealt with in accordance with the FOI Act.

A request for an internal review should be submitted in writing to FOI Request Reviews, NHS Improvement, Wellington House, 133-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG or by email to nhsi.foi@nhs.net.

Publication

Please note that this letter [and the attached information] will shortly be published on our website. This is because information disclosed in accordance with the FOI Act is disclosed to the public at large. We will, of course, remove your personal information (e.g. your name and contact details) from the version of the letter published on our website to protect your personal information from general disclosure.

Yours sincerely,

NHS Improvement