

Patient record access: turning it on, sharing the learning: learning from the project

Key findings

- For some patients, access to records can improve the GP service, support relationship change and help them to feel more in control of their health.
- For relationship change to take place, records access needs to be embedded across all areas of the practice, from GP consultation to back-office administration. The online system needs to work well and be easy for patients and practices to use.
- Most of the patients that the project team interviewed signed up because they had a general interest in seeing their records.
- Clinicians are concerned that online records access will add to their workload. Effective engagement is critical to addressing these concerns and helping clinicians to understand the benefits that it can bring to some patients.
- Practices should focus on quality rather than quantity to achieve relationship change through records access – the emphasis should be on people actively using the system, rather than on having a large number of patients signed up but not using it.

Successes

- **Improved relationships:** For a small number of patients, having real-time electronic access to their medical records had a very positive effect on their relationship with their GP and their ability to manage their own health. One patient commented: 'It gives me the steering wheel when it comes to managing my own healthcare...the amount of time I have to spend when I do see medical professionals, that time, I've already pre-informed myself so I can speak to them on a level and we can get further.'
- **Sharing good practice:** The project team developed the [My record website](#) to give patients information about accessing their medical records online, ahead of the 2015 deadline for everyone to have the opportunity to do this. The website includes patient videos, personal stories, project summaries and resources for patients, practices and the NHS.

Challenges

- **Technical difficulties:** The project was affected by significant technical problems with the online records system, which meant that a large amount of time and effort was spent on helping practices and patients to use the system, rather than focusing on the outcomes of use. While the team was able to improve the guidance they provided to users and share ways to work around problems, they could not change the design and delivery of the system itself.
- **Time pressures:** Primary care clinicians face enormous time pressures and some were reluctant to add to their workload by engaging with records access, which was seen as a non-essential task. The government has since announced plans for all patients to be able to access their medical records online by the end of 2015, so it will become an essential task.

Advice to others

The team's main piece of advice to anyone undertaking a similar project, or any IT project, is to make sure that the technology works well and is easy for people to use. The system needs to be fully tested and functional before being rolled out for public use.

They also stress the importance of engaging clinicians and other staff from the beginning, spending time listening to their concerns and working with them to find an approach that everyone feels comfortable with.