

Abstract

'Connecting for Health' – the Impact of the National Programme for IT on Pharmacy Practice

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The National Programme for IT within the National Health Service (NHS) in England is designed to connect the capabilities of modern IT with the delivery of the Government's strategic plan for the NHS. It includes the electronic transmission of prescriptions, a national electronic health records service, an electronic appointment booking (referral) service and a supporting national broadband network. The programme is expected to cost over £20 Billion and will eventually link all parts of the health service, both primary and secondary care.

Service improvement is at the heart of the initiative and this is no more evident than in the community pharmacy setting. For pharmacists to undertake new roles such as supplementary and independent prescribing in community pharmacies, they will need access to patient information via the NHS Care Records Service, to communicate effectively with other members of the health care team, pharmacists need access to the internet and email and to free up pharmacists' time from dispensing to allow them to deliver new patient services such as diagnostic testing and medication reviews, pharmacies will need to participate in the NHS electronic prescriptions service.

The timescale for delivering the programme is short and the NHS Care Records Service has already experienced a number of delays. Current key concerns include the accuracy of data transfer, consent procedures for data transfer and sharing, agreeing liability for shared records and errors in transfer between systems, acceptance of new systems by health professionals and issues around ownership of data.