

# **The Experts in the Room**

## **Personal Health Records at Haughton Medical Centres, Denton & Hyde, Tameside**

### **Introduction**

Recent innovations in technology and free access to information are providing more opportunities for transparency and trust within public services. Data that was previously closely guarded is now often shared openly. For many on the margins of society, suspicion of public services and their staff is rife. How can new technology be used to promote trust, and encourage a stronger patient-GP relationship? How can openness and accountability be safely and effectively developed?

### **Origins of the project**

Taking on a new practice is challenging for any GP; trusting relationships with thousands of new patients must be established. But when Dr Amir Hannan took on Haughton Thornley Medical Centre in Denton, he had significant additional challenges: the surgery is the former practice of the notorious Dr Harold Shipman who was convicted of 15 murders in 2000.

Hannan knew that complete transparency and openness was needed, and reasoned that confidence could be restored if patients were able to see their own medical records. Electronic health records were developed for patients at Haughton Thornley in 2003, and were rolled out between 2006 and 2008. By 2014, 11,832 people were using the online system, representing 20% of the practice's patients.

The project was delivered without any additional funding. GP funding stems from the services they provide; there has been no funding earmarked for GP record access.

### **Partnership working**

Hannan worked with Glen Griffiths, who has experience in building interactive health web platforms, to introduce patients to the concept. Professor Ian Buchan from the University of Manchester developed electronic health records for Haughton Thornley patients.

### **Approach and delivery**

Hannan's core goal was to put patients in control of their health care, not render them passive recipients. The decision to enfranchise and educate patients reflects an approach that values them as an asset, fosters a sense of equal open partnership, and acknowledges the importance of patient control. Recognising that patients have an expert opinion on their own conditions has become a priority of the project.

The software allows all medical records to be accessed anywhere online. Patients therefore require basic IT literacy – though skills and access are growing in reach and penetration. Recruitment of patients is key to the success of the scheme. Once enabled, patient access to the Personal Health Record is permanent unless revoked on request.

Patients are offered the chance to access their medical records when they see one of the GPs involved in the scheme. The Practice Manager also advocates access. Patient Participation Groups promote the benefits of shared access to medical records, and

goodwill has developed over time. A lot of time has been invested sharing the vision and educating patients. But there is clear evidence that patients do need support on how to understand and use their information safely, appropriately and effectively.

### **Success and outcomes**

Research has shown that the electronic system is reducing demand on health services. The surgery has observed: a reduction in GP visits and phone calls; improved use of or compliance with medication; improved prevention and follow-up; improved quality of care and disease management; and a reduction in use of healthcare resources.

Benefits for Houghton Thornley Medical Centre include a considerable improvement in practice efficiency; there are fewer appointments needed per patient and there is a reduction in work absence. There is also a fall in record errors, and an improvement in the practice's environmental footprint.

### **Future plans and obstacles**

One obstacle to electronic record access is poor IT literacy among patients. Many in deprived or vulnerable communities are least likely to have internet or computer access, meaning that those who could benefit the most may have the least access. A further challenge is the lack of a national organisation willing to invest in improved GP record access; many have concluded that growth and spread will be market-enabled.

Despite these obstacles, there is certainly scope to scale up and replicate the achievements at Houghton Thornley Medical Centres. About 60% of GP practices across the UK use the EMIS system software that allows for patient access to their record.

### **Conclusion**

Houghton Thornley Medical Centre's electronic medical records have allowed patients' greater control over their own health and wellbeing, fostering a vital sense of empowerment and trust. The innovative and resourceful system is a cost-effective way to improve health services in deprived areas.