

Temporary changes to GP Connect and the Summary Care Record (SCR)

NHSX and NHS Digital are making temporary changes to GP Connect and to the Summary Care Record to help the NHS respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. These changes are to improve the access that doctors, nurses and authorised health and care professionals have to medical records and information, and to help them to more safely treat and advise patients who are not attending their usual GP practice, who have called NHS 111, or who are receiving care in another setting.

A letter explaining these temporary changes was sent to GP Practices on 24 April 2020.

The action being taken is in response to the Notice issued on 20 March 2020 under Regulation 3(4) of the Health Service Control of Patient Information (COPI) Regulations 2002 requiring confidential patient information to be shared in the circumstances set out in the Notice and which provides the legal basis for the action.

In line with the notice, the changes will remain during the period of the Covid-19 emergency period as set out in the Notice which is until 30 September 2020 (unless extended or reduced) at which point systems will return to their current state, unless alternative arrangements have been put in place before then.

The BMA and RCGP have issued a joint statement in support of these actions, in which they have confirmed that they will continue to engage with NHSX and NHSD to ensure that the action being taken is proportionate and strikes a balance between making information readily available to provide the best care, whilst protecting the rights and expectations of patients.

Changes for GP Connect

The GP Connect services will be switched on nationally for all practices across the country, providing two key capabilities: Access Record: HTML and Appointment Management.

Access Record: HTML capability will give authorised health and care professionals working in primary care, NHS 111 - including the Covid Clinical Assessment Service (CCAS) - and other appropriate direct care settings, access to the GP records of the patients they are treating, regardless of where they are registered. This is access to the full patient record, including the previous free text entries and access is auditable and traceable. Appointment Management will allow remote organisations such as NHS 111 to book appointments directly with the patients GP Practice, including the ability to manage referrals from the Covid Clinical Assessment Service (CCAS).

Changes to the Summary Care Record (SCR)

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, under the Notice, the requirement to have explicit consent to share the SCR-Additional Information has been removed, and it will now automatically be included in all patient SCRs unless a patient has expressed a preference not to include it.

The Additional Information includes information such as:

Details of the management of long-term conditions

Medications

Immunisations

Care plan information

Significant medical history, past and present.

This will provide a wider range of health and care professionals across the country with faster access to more information about the patients they are treating.

Whilst the requirement for explicit consent to share has been temporarily removed, Healthcare professionals must only access a SCR where they have the patient's permission to do so or in an emergency when a patient is unable to give consent. Patients also still have the option to opt out of sharing the Additional Information or the SCR completely and a form has been published to allow patients to exercise those options. The completed form will be returned to their practice and practices will then need to make changes in exactly the same way as they currently do.

NHSX and NHS Digital have produced guidance with further details on both of these changes. Both the guidance and the letter contain specific instructions for practices using Vision or Microtest clinical systems regarding these changes.

Recommended actions for GP practices

Record the temporary data flow changes in their Practice's Record of Processing Activities (ROPA).

Link your practice privacy notice to this Supplementary Privacy Notice for Summary Care Records.

Be aware that a patient can still opt out of sharing the extended information in the SCR or the sharing of the SCR altogether and that the form published to allow patients to exercise that option, will be returned to the practice and the practice should make changes in exactly the same way they currently do.

Your GP System Supplier will be in contact with your practice if there is any set up/configuration required for GP Connect.