MANAGING THE CHALLENGES FOR THE PRACTICE OF PROVIDING ONLINE RECORD ACCESS

Online record access can present challenges to the practice, summarised here. There is more information about them in other guidance in the RCGP Patient Online Toolkit.

Ensure that patients are aware of how to keep their records secure and protect their own privacy, especially if they may be coerced to share their data unwillingly. Consider asking someone that you might recommend record access to “Do you think that you may come under pressure to give access to someone else unwillingly?”.

- Explain to patients how they can benefit from record online access. Using a standard patient leaflet for using online record access can reinforce verbal advice.
- Carefully consider the risks of failure to keep the records secure and coercion to share access unwillingly for vulnerable patients.
- Ask the patient to complete the practice application form if they are new to online record access.
- Take time to explain poor data quality, potentially harmful information or abnormal test results or bad news in clinical correspondence to patients.
- Develop a practice plan for dealing with poor record data quality, especially in historic data, and hiding (redacting) sensitive data, which is confidential third party information and information may be harmful to the patient, and for responding to patients who raise concerns about them.
- Protect patients from seeing sensitive data already in their record when they apply for record access. This requires a careful check of the record before switching on record access. This is a process known as clinical assurance of the record. It can hard and time consuming to find all the sensitive data in historical uncoded text, or clinical correspondence. If you are going to allow access to these types of data, e.g. to share care plans, consider restricting online access to prospective data recorded after access is switched on.
- Managing the workload involved in assuring that the record is fit to share with the patient when they apply for record access. Consider setting a maximum number of new applications that the practice will clinically assure in one month and explain to applicants how long they may have to wait for access.
- Manage abnormal results and communication with the patient about them carefully.
- Remember some patients may not benefit from having online access to their record. If there are safeguarding or coercion concerns, if the patient has difficulty understanding their records, or if access to their records directly results in increasing anxiety, it may be in the patient’s best interests for the practice to refuse or withdraw access of all, or parts of their Online Patient record.

Related toolkit resources
- Protecting the Safety of Patients and Staff
- Online Record Access – getting started
- Patient information for Online Access
- Online Appointments and Prescriptions – getting started
- Data Quality