

# Patient portals



In May 2012, the Department of Health published its information strategy 'Power of information' which aims to put us all in control of the health and care information we need [1]. As a part of its information strategy a key role for patient information portals was outlined. Similar plans are already in place with NHS Scotland and NHS Wales [2,3].

Patient portals attempt to offer personalised health information directly to patients as well as enable contact with care providers through an electronic medium. The main purpose of patient portals is to allow patients to take more control of their own health by accessing and updating records using the internet.

## What are patient portals?

They are secure websites where patients use unique log-in details to access a personalised area of information specific to that patient. In this way they are analogous to most online banking services – safe, convenient and offer specific personal information. Like online banking they are generally institution specific but patient portals allow a direct two-way interaction. Patients can glean useful information such as test results and interact directly with a clinician or secretary. An informed patient can look at his / her laboratory results and radiology, view appointments and procedure-specific information directly from the portal.

## Potential uses of patient portals

### Information

- Discharge summaries
- Discharge medications
- Laboratory results
- Pathology results
- Limited imaging results
- View appointments
- Allergies
- Procedure explanations

### Provider interaction

- Send secure emails / personal messages
- Fill in clinical and administrative questionnaires
- Book appointments
- Video consultations

## UK urological patient information portals

### The University College London Hospitals cancer centre portal

is an example of an established patient portal. The trust's website offers a web-based tutorial detailing the resource's main features. There are three levels of access from level one (appointments and generic information) up to level three (allowing you to view clinical documents). The system displays various teams caring for cancer patients detailing individual team members with the option to send direct messages to teams. Patients can also record physical and psychological issues during their treatments so these

can be addressed in clinic.

**Myhealth@QEHB** is a portal at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust. It offers video guides on its website to explain its many functions. The portal allows the patient to organise hospital visits as part of a 'My Calendar' function as well as view their inpatient history. They can view blood test results directly and upload documents, images and scans from outside the trust into a 'vault' where they can be accessed by QEHB staff.

**eHealth by NHS Lothian** will soon be available to its first patient cohort after a successful trial period. According to project manager Kelly Smith the system will hopefully give patients access to appropriate clinic letters and imaging results. Blood tests with patient friendly comments will potentially be available as will secure messaging to clinical teams.

### My Health Online by NHS

**Wales** allows patients to book GP appointments, order repeat prescriptions and update general administrative details such as the change of address.

The **Welsh Clinical Portal by NHS Wales** is a clinical portal where the aim is to gather data from separate systems into an easily accessible record, which can be viewed for any patient throughout Wales. This clinical portal is aimed at clinicians and improving the delivery of care to patients from multiple systems which do not communicate directly with each other.

## How will patient portals change things?

The main benefit of portals is to allow patients access to their own health information. As Martin Egan, Director for eHealth at NHS Lothian explained, "For too long, patients have relied on healthcare professionals to find out and monitor basic information about their health or condition. The portal helps to encourage a step-change in putting the patient at the centre of the NHS."

Patient and clinical portals will form a greater part of urological practice. As well as making patients feel more involved, portals can ease pressure on general practitioners and urologists to relay information to one another. They can also cut costs, staff time and paperwork and although there is only limited evidence for their implementation [4] they are rapidly expanding into all aspects of clinical practice.

#### References

1. Department of Health. *Power of information. Putting all of us in control of the health and care information we need*. London, UK; Department of Health; 2012.
2. The Scottish Government. *eHealth Strategy, NHS Scotland*. Edinburgh, UK; 2011.
3. Service NWI. *NHS Wales Informatics Service - Welsh Clinical Portal [Internet]*. Available from: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/nwis/page/52547> Last accessed January 2014.
4. Goldzweig CL, Orshansky G, Paige NM, et al. Electronic Patient Portals: Evidence on Health Outcomes, Satisfaction, Efficiency, and Attitudes A Systematic Review. *Ann Intern Med* 2013;**159**:677-87.

#### Resources

**UCLH cancer centre patient portal** – <http://www.uclh.nhs.uk/OurServices/OurHospitals/UCH/CC/Pages/patientportal.aspx>

**myhealth@QEHB** - <https://www.myhealth.uhb.nhs.uk>

**My Health Online by NHS Wales** – <https://www.myhealthonline-inps.wales.nhs.uk>

#### Will Evans,

CT1 in Urology,  
East Lancashire NHS Hospitals.

#### Ivo Dukic,

Urology ST7,  
East Lancashire NHS Hospitals.

**Twitter: @urolsurg**