

Patient online gives patients the option to make appointments, order repeat prescriptions and view their electronic medical record online, using their computer, tablet or smartphone rather than having to phone or visit their practice.

Wem & Prees Medical Practice recognises the benefits of patient online access and is committed to enabling patients access in an efficient manner whilst ensuring that appropriate checks and safeguards are in place to ensure that the interests our patients are protected and that there is no misuse of the system.

This document should be read in conjunction with the online registration pack and forms our online access policy.

Before new patients register for access to their practice's online services, it is important that they understand that they will be responsible for protecting the information about them that they will see. This guidance explains what the practice may do to ensure the patient knows how to protect the confidential nature of the practice record.

Some patients choose to share their online access login details informally with family, friends and carers (including a care home). This is called informal proxy access. Patients may also nominate third parties to register with the practice to use online services on behalf of the patient, including access to the patient record, booking or cancelling appointments and requesting prescriptions. If the practice agrees they provide the third party with their own login details. This is called formal proxy access. Patients who enquire about giving someone else access to their online practice services should be warned that there are extra risks they should bear in mind. Similarly any third-party who is given access to the patient's record must understand their responsibility for protecting the patient's confidentiality.

Verbal advice to the patient or proxy may be reinforced by written information in a Records access patient information leaflet and on the practice website. The registration form and the Proxy access consent forms that patients and proxies should sign when they register for online access may carry a reminder of the need to keep the login details secure and the information confidential.

Doctors and other practice staff need to be satisfied that they either have direct agreement from a patient or have followed formal authorisation to allow proxy access where consent has not been possible to secure. For complete information please refer to Proxy access guidance for general practice. The same applies to anyone registered as having proxy record to a record. (This can be found on the RCGP website).

### Security of online access

In signing up for online services, especially if they want to have access to their medical record, patients must be strongly advised to keep their login details safe and must understand that if they share or lose these details, their information may no longer be secure. If they do ever suspect that someone else has gained access to their records or online services without their permission, they must change their password immediately and inform the practice as soon as possible.

The practice must look for evidence that the patient's appointments or prescriptions have not been accessed or misused or that their record has been accessed inappropriately and report their findings to the patient.

### Preventing unintended access to health information

Patients should be aware of simple advice to help them prevent unintended access to their records by someone else:

- Passwords and other login information must be kept safely and securely to prevent anyone else using them without the permission of the patient
- Passwords should be easy to remember but should not be based on something that is easy for someone to guess or work out, such as birthdays or children's names
- Access to the computer or other device (such as a smartphone or tablet) used to access the online services should be protected by a password or a PIN. Antivirus software should be used where possible and software installation that might compromise the security of the computer should always be avoided
- Patients should log out of their web browser after they have finished using online access, so that information is not inadvertently made available to others if the browser is left open. Other people may be able to see open web pages, particularly if the patient is using a computer in a public place. If the patient thinks someone might have accessed their record without permission, they should change their password as soon as possible and contact a member of the practice team to tell them
- Patients must be aware of the risks of downloading and printing information from the practice and be careful to keep these secure. This means disposing of paper or digital copies safely
- People with visual difficulties and using audio electronic readers need to be careful to avoid being overheard, especially in public places.

This guidance is partly based on a short booklet called 'Keeping Your Health and Social Care Records Safe', produced in 2013 by the British Computer Society and the Department of Health. This booklet gives more detailed information about the need to have good firewalls on home computer systems, to delete browser histories, and to make sure that virus-checking software is up-to-date. Copies are available on request in reception.

### Proxy access

- Patients may choose to give access to someone else, a proxy, by sharing their login details, but they should first give careful consideration to the issues set out here. The health records that the proxy may have access to may contain sensitive information that the patient wishes to keep confidential. Even prescription records alone may disclose information about the nature of conditions that the patient has. Medical information may also reveal something about family members, especially information about conditions with genetic components. It is very important that the patient has complete trust in anyone who they allow to have access to their records. If in any doubt, they should not share.
- The practice may recommend to patients with online access that the practice provide formal proxy access to them.

- The practice should verify the identity of anyone to whom they give log in details to a patient's online services and formally register them with the practice for online access to the named patient's records and services (please see Proxy access guidance for general practice). This will enable an audit trail of who has accessed the record if the practice GP system has this feature.
- The practice should give anyone who registers for proxy access the same advice on security and confidentiality that they would give to patients registering for online access.
- Advice about parental and child rights to access children's health records can also be found in the Proxy access guidance for general practice.

### Coercion

The use of online services of all types makes a patient vulnerable to coercion to share their personal health information against their will, including login details, medical history, repeat prescription orders, GP appointment booking details and other private, personal information.

- GPs, practice managers and administration staff involved in registering patients for online services need to be aware of the potential impact of coercion, and signs to look out for to help patients. For complete information please refer to Coercion guidance for general practice
- If someone tries to force or coerce the patient into sharing their records or login information, the patient should tell the practice as soon as possible. The practice can suspend or withdraw access rights when coercion is suspected.

### Data Quality

- Practice records sometimes contain errors or omissions. Information such as a scanned letter or consultation record may be added to the wrong patient's record, particularly if names are similar or the same. It is important to advise the patient to inform the practice if they see any information in their record that is wrong, out of date or is not about them.

### Responsible use of online appointment and prescription services

In addition to the general responsibilities of patients and proxies to understand the principles of information governance of online access there are also specific considerations about access to appointment and prescription services. Practices should make their expectations clear when patients register for access to these services to avoid misunderstandings in the future. Important points to discuss and include in written information about online access include the following:

- Online appointment systems enable patients to book appointments with one or more healthcare professionals. They will probably be able to book more than one appointment at the same time. The practice may choose to limit the number of online appointments that a patient may book at any one time
- Patients should be asked to use the online system to cancel appointments as soon as they become aware that they will not use the appointment slot
- Consider encouraging patients to book appointments with their usual doctor or nurse to promote continuity of care



- Some online prescription systems allow patients to request repeat prescriptions before they are due, and request prescriptions that are not on their repeat prescription list. Patients should be asked to explain the reasons for early requests (preparation for a holiday, perhaps) and 'off- list' prescriptions. They should understand that the prescription service must not be used in place of a consultation to obtain a new prescription.

#### Patient/Practice agreement

When registering a new or existing patient (or a proxy for a patient) for online access, the patient should be given a Records access patient information leaflet and asked to sign the registration form to confirm that they have read and understood their responsibilities.