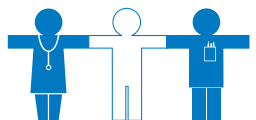


The Electronic Prescription Service

An introduction for
healthcare professionals



With about 1.3 million prescriptions now being issued every working day in England – and this figure expected to rise by over 5% each year – we need to change from a paper-based prescription system to an electronic one which is more efficient.

The Electronic Prescription Service will be introduced throughout England by the end of 2007, with the changes starting now.

It will enable electronic prescriptions to be generated, transmitted, received and, once dispensed, sent to the reimbursement agency. It will also allow patients to nominate specific dispensers should they wish to.

Eventually, most paper prescriptions will be replaced by electronic ones, bringing improvements in service, convenience and accuracy.

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For more detailed and fully up-to-date information please visit www.cfh.nhs.uk/eps

The Electronic Prescription Service is part of NHS Connecting for Health's (NHS CFH) Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions (ETP) programme, which also includes integrating the Electronic Prescription Service with the NHS Care Records Service.

A user's view

“It will bring great advantages for the practice as well as for the patients.”

Dr Narendra Pal Singh
GP, Cleethorpes



Introduction

By the end of 2007, GP surgeries, community pharmacies and appliance contractors will have access to the Electronic Prescription Service.

Prescribers working from a GP surgery will be able to use the service and, later, prescribers working from other locations such as walk-in centres or dental practices will also be included.

The Electronic Prescription Service will enable electronic prescriptions to be generated, transmitted and received so that pharmacists and other dispensers can dispense against them.

In time, dispensers will also be able to submit these electronic prescriptions to a reimbursement agency (currently the Prescription Pricing Authority) in order to claim payment. Eventually, in most cases, electronic prescriptions will replace paper ones.

Why it is being introduced

With a growing number of prescriptions being issued (currently around 1.3 million each working day in England), we need to change from a paper-based system to an electronic one which is more efficient, consistently accurate and able to cope with expected further increases in the number of prescriptions.

The Electronic Prescription Service will also bring a range of benefits to patients, GPs, pharmacists and other people – the extent of which will depend upon individual circumstances.

In particular, about 70% of prescriptions are now repeat prescriptions and the new Electronic Prescription Service has been designed to streamline the current time-consuming system used for dealing with them. For example, fewer patients will need to visit their GP surgery just to collect a repeat prescription, saving time for both patients and surgery staff.

For many pharmacists, the need to physically collect patients' prescriptions from surgeries will become obsolete.

Also, accuracy and safety will be improved; prescription information will be more complete, and will not need to be typed in by the GP or other prescriber and then again by the pharmacist or other dispenser. The information provided by the prescriber will simply be downloaded by the dispenser.

Receiving prescriptions electronically from the prescriber, rather than waiting for the patient to arrive with a piece of paper, will also assist dispensers in managing their workflow and stock control.

In the longer term, it is planned that the Electronic Prescription Service will be integrated with the NHS Care Records Service.

As well as automatically recording what has been prescribed on a patient's NHS Care Record, the Electronic Prescription Service will, subject to consent, provide the GP and other healthcare professionals with information on what has actually been dispensed to patients – improving the care they can provide.

How it works

Each GP surgery and pharmacy (or other dispenser) will go through two main stages of change – based upon two software upgrades which are known as “Release 1” and “Release 2”.

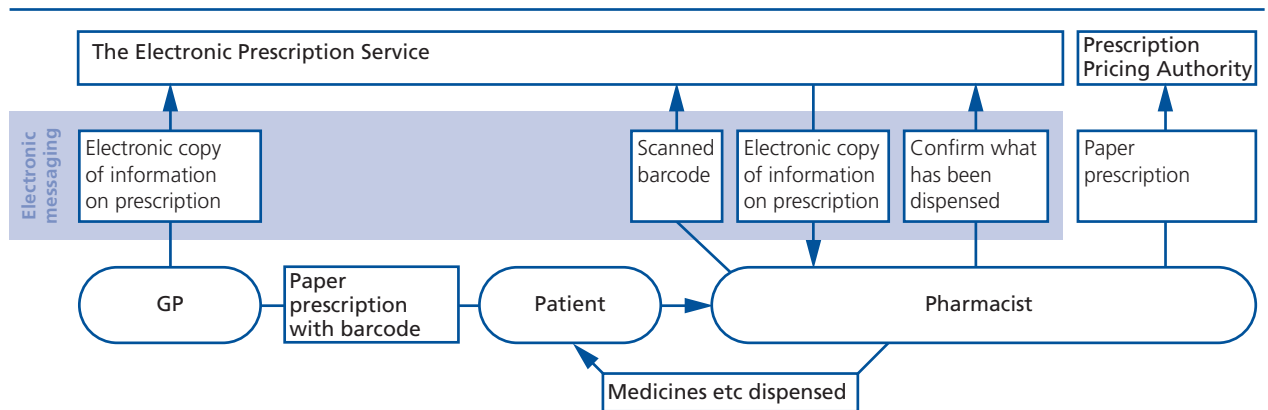
Access to the Electronic Prescription Service will be tightly controlled through the use of smartcards issued to individual GPs, pharmacists and other approved users, providing them with different levels of access as appropriate.

Release 1

Patients will not notice much change when their GP surgery has implemented Release 1. They will still receive a paper prescription, which will be almost identical to the current FP10 paper prescription form except that it will have a barcode on it. This barcode represents a unique code to identify the prescription – it contains no personal information.

When the prescriber issues this paper prescription, an electronic copy of the information on it will be sent to the Electronic Prescription Service. This copy will have attached to it the same unique code as is represented by the barcode on the paper prescription. When a dispenser who has also implemented Release 1 of the software receives a paper prescription which has a barcode on it, scanning the barcode will retrieve the electronic copy of the information onto the dispenser’s computer. There will be no need to retype the information into the dispenser’s system, as there is currently.

The dispenser will then dispense the medicine or appliance as usual, with the same level of safety checks as before. If the patient takes the prescription to a pharmacy which has not yet implemented Release 1, it will be processed in the same way as paper prescriptions are now.



Release 2

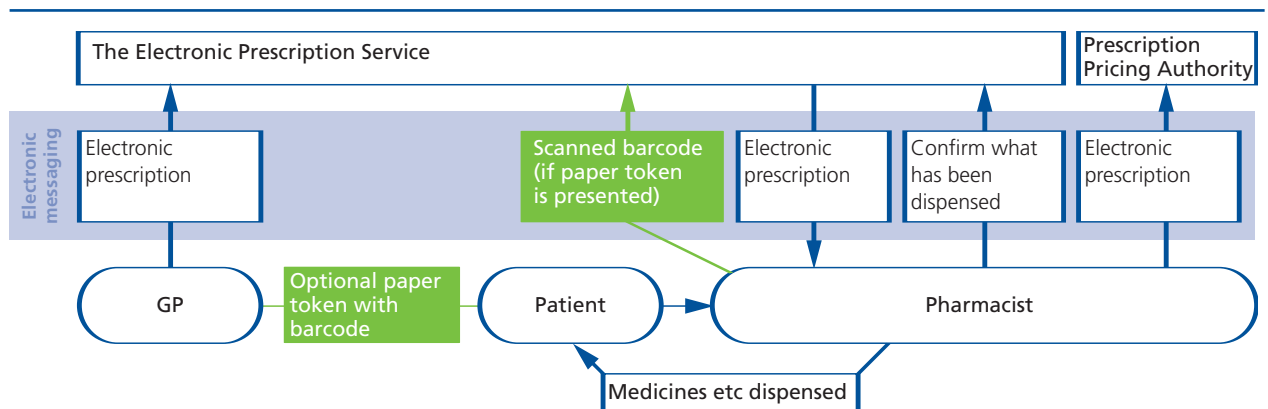
When a GP surgery has implemented Release 2, the prescriber will be able to apply an electronic signature to the electronic message, making it the prescription against which drugs etc can be dispensed. The smartcards, which control access to the Electronic Prescription Service, will also control who is allowed to electronically sign a prescription.

Patients will be able to nominate a pharmacy (and/or other dispenser) if there is one they wish to use on a regular basis. If they do this, their nominated dispenser(s) will be able to receive their prescriptions electronically without the patient having to collect anything from the prescriber, avoiding visits to the surgery just to pick up a prescription and enabling dispensers to prepare the patient's medicine in advance of the patient arriving to collect it.

Patients who do not wish to use the nomination option will receive a barcoded paper copy of their prescription. Any dispenser they take it to will be able to scan this barcode and draw down the electronic prescription as described for the first stage of the service.

Patients will be able to change their nominated pharmacy at any time. It is anticipated that nomination will usually take place at the pharmacy or other dispenser.

Once the majority of GP surgeries and pharmacies and other dispensers have implemented Release 2, the need for paper prescriptions will considerably reduce and the default position will become the issue of an electronic prescription.



Implementation

This two-stage approach will enable complete validation of all technical, clinical and process aspects of the full-scale system while the paper-based system is still operating. It will also allow users to become familiar with the software and processes before any significant changes affecting patients are implemented.

System suppliers have been upgrading their current systems to make them EPS compliant. Following a period of development, each system supplier goes through a process of testing which is followed by a trial at an “initial implementer” site. When the supplier’s system has been shown to be of the necessary standard (clinically and technically), the supplier is permitted to start a wider rollout which is monitored by NHS Connecting for Health.

More detailed information about implementation is available from www.cfh.nhs.uk/eps/implementation. Detailed guidance will also be provided to those people involved in the deployment of the service.

Working with you

To ensure that the Electronic Prescription Service is robust and fit for purpose, NHS Connecting for Health has sought input from key stakeholders throughout the service’s design and development.

Specially created user groups, meeting on a regular basis, have provided different perspectives on key design issues. This work has included looking at the live operation of the service in the initial implementer sites. Reviewing the early operational experiences at these sites has also helped to ensure that the potential benefits of the new service can be maximised. These groups also inform the development of communication and guidance material.

The main user groups are the GP User Group, Pharmacy User Group and Patient User Group, which will continue to operate throughout the implementation of the service. An Implementation Reference Group is also helping to inform the implementation of the service via Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). In addition, other groups of stakeholders have been brought together on occasions to consider particular issues.



A user's view

“Having run the Electronic Prescription Service for eight months... I’m running a smoother and safer pharmacy.”

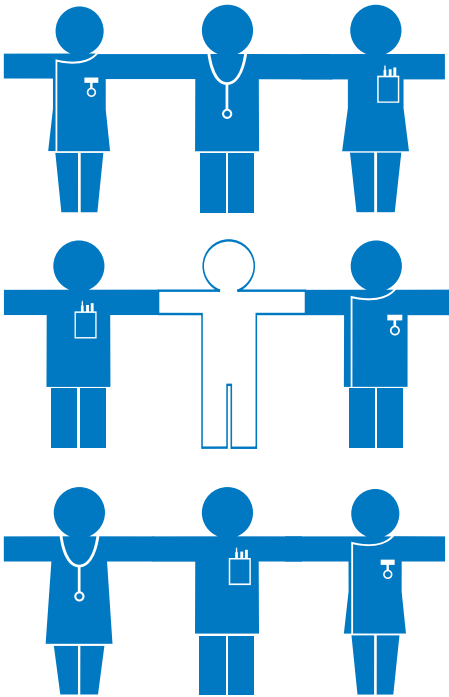
Andrew Murphy
Pharmacist, Keighley

More information

More information on when the changes will affect you will be available from your system supplier or PCT.

Guidance is being published to support those people involved in implementing the changes through each phase of change. Materials to help you explain the changes to patients are also available in a range of languages and formats.

For these publications and other information, visit www.cfh.nhs.uk/eps. This site will be regularly updated with new information.



To request further copies of this leaflet
please visit www.cfh.nhs.uk/publications
or call 08453 700760 quoting
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