

Making the Case for Information:

The evidence for investing in high quality health information for patients and the public



Patient Information Forum

For Professionals Working in Consumer Health Information

A summary briefing for commissioners and policy makers

Providing health information to patients and their carers leads to better outcomes, reduced costs and a better experience of care. A focus on patient experience can deliver business benefits for health providers through improved productivity, reduced waste and greater efficiency, avoided costs and enhanced organisational reputation.

There are powerful legal, moral, ethical and financial incentives for providing information to enable people to better manage their health and wellbeing and make fully informed decisions about their treatment and care. Commissioners and policy makers have a vital role to play in ensuring that information for patients and the public is of a high quality, is effectively commissioned, systematically provided and properly resourced.

The Case for Information is compelling

The provision of health information to patients and the public is now firmly embedded in health policy across the UK.

Providing access to quality health information and support is crucial to unlocking what has been termed the 'blockbuster drug' of patient engagement.

Patient engagement is vital to help people manage their health, make informed decisions about their healthcare and reduce financial pressure on the health service.

Yet information for patients, in most places, remains a 'nice to have' instead of a 'must do'. Whether someone receives information to support their care is currently a lottery. Despite the rhetoric, we are a long way away from truly informed decision-making for all.

The *Case for Information* provides clear evidence about the benefits:

- High quality health information has a positive impact on service utilisation and health costs, patients' experience of healthcare and patients' health behaviour and status.
- There are good business reasons to justify the investment of more time, money and training in health information provision and support. These include positive impacts on service use and costs, substantial capacity savings, and significant returns on investment by increasing the self-management of long-term conditions and attracting customers.
- Providing consumers with high quality and accessible health information helps to enhance their experience of care. It also helps achieve the other two quality domains - clinical effectiveness and patient safety. This is core business for the NHS and an important motivator for staff. It forms part of the statutory duty to improve quality - both a 'must do' and the right thing to do.

Informed patients, effective choices

The benefits of information are so powerful that some researchers have developed the concept of 'information therapy' and argue that information can be as important to health as any medicine, test or surgery.

Patients want and need effective communication so that they are able to make informed choices about their healthcare.

To have substantial effects, information first has to be successfully communicated - so that it translates to greater patient knowledge and understanding. This is crucial to achieving patients' active engagement and behaviour change.

PIF believes that information provision must be integrated into health and care delivery, with board level support, dedicated personnel and appropriate resources to deliver it.

Better outcomes

Engaging patients through the provision of high quality health information and support enables the delivery of better quality care - greater clinical effectiveness, enhanced patient experience and improved patient safety.

It leads to better outcomes for patients through:

- Treatment in line with patient preferences, better adherence to treatment and safer, more effective use of medicines
- Healthier behaviours
- Improved health, quality of life and psychological wellbeing
- Greater health literacy, which leads to reduced health inequalities
- Fewer complaints, medical errors and expensive legal challenges.



Lower costs

Engaged patients also mean lower costs, through:

- Reduced demand for GP services and unplanned care
- More appropriate use of services, including screening
- Fewer hospital admissions, less time in hospital, less major surgery
- Reduced variation in procedures
- Greater productivity, lower staff turnover and less absenteeism
- Reduced litigation and claims for compensation.

A better patient experience

Providing consumers with high quality and accessible health information helps to enhance patients' experience of care through:

- Improved knowledge, understanding and recall
- Increased ability to share decision-making with clinicians
- Greater ability to self-care and self-manage conditions
- More realistic expectations about health outcomes
- Making them more satisfied and engaged.

The business case

If we fail to provide patients with the information and support they need, we compromise all three dimensions of quality care - patient experience, patient safety and clinical effectiveness. The NHS suffers through higher costs, lower efficiency and increased claims of negligence.

We can save the NHS billions of pounds by addressing what the Kings Fund has termed 'the silent misdiagnosis' - the failure to fully inform and involve patients in decisions about their care.

At a challenging time for the NHS, it is therefore a financial, clinical and moral imperative to support patients with better information. To do any less will continue to compromise quality and waste scarce public resources

The commissioner and policy maker role

- 1 Champion high quality health information, raise awareness of its importance and properly commission and resource it.
- 2 Ensure that staff are aware of the incentives, levers and obligations to provide health information.
- 3 Commission high quality information resources and services, which meet the needs of patients, which provide relevant and appropriate information and which are supported by staff.



The Patient Information Forum (PiF) is the organisation for people working in consumer health information. PiF is a UK wide, not-for-profit, independent organisation with members in all healthcare sectors.

We commissioned Grant Riches Communication Consultants (www.grantriches.co.uk) to identify evidence on the benefits of providing, and the harms of not providing, high quality consumer health information.

The research was funded by the Department of Health's Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund and Macmillan Cancer Support (www.macmillan.org.uk).

This briefing is aimed at commissioners and policy makers. You can read a more detailed executive summary and the full research report at www.pifonline.org.uk.

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