

August 2012

## Policy Briefing: NHS Information Strategy

Following on from the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the Department of Health has developed a strategy for how information will be used by all public health and care providers across England. The focus of the strategy is on improving access to healthcare information for patients, carers and members of the public. This policy briefing aims to summarise the strategy and outline its impact on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people.

### What is changing?

The Information Strategy aims to improve access to and use of information in four areas:

#### *Information about me and my care*

- Health and care professionals and organisations will keep clear records about your health care. You will have the right to access this record and any information about you.
- You will be able to access your GP record online by 2015.
- Support will be offered to anyone who needs it in order to access and understand information about their health and care.
- Information in your care record will be kept safe and confidential.

#### *Connected information for integrated care*

- Information you give to any health or care professional will be recorded and shared so that you don't have to repeat it each time you access a service.
- Your own unique NHS number will be used on all of your records so that they are kept together.
- Professionals will be able to access any useful records about you online but it will be done in a way that will keep your information safe and in one place.
- Services across England will have to use IT systems that can work together so that information can be shared wherever you are.

#### *Better access to better information*

From March 2013:

- 999 will be the number to call for emergencies
- 111 will be the number to call if you need medical help or advice straight away but it is not life threatening
- An online information portal will link to information on health and care from the NHS and other healthcare providers

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## *A quality-driven information system*

- Anonymised health and care information and feedback on services will be available through the NHS Information Centre.
- The Information Centre will provide a special secure service that allows health professionals and scientists to get information about the health of the population. This will help them to develop better treatments and medicines for the future.

## **What does this mean for me?**

Your health and care information will be recorded in one electronic record, which will be accessible to all health and care providers when you access a service. This will mean that whatever service you access and wherever it is, the healthcare provider will be aware of your health history and your care path should be more streamlined. If you have a carer, you will be able to authorise them to have access to your health and care record.

It is important that your health record contains all the information relevant to your health – including your sexual orientation. Sexual orientation itself is not a health issue, but it is a characteristic that can have an impact on your life and your health chances, in the same way as other characteristics like age or ethnicity. If your healthcare provider knows your sexual orientation they will be aware of health issues to discuss with you, such as smoking and substance use, sexual health testing and cancer screening. Having your sexual orientation recorded on your health record will also mean that you won't have to go through coming out as LGB to each care provider you meet.

At the moment, sexual orientation is not routinely monitored by every healthcare provider, while other characteristics (such as age or ethnicity) are monitored. LGB people have the right to good quality healthcare and information about their health. Ensuring that sexual orientation is monitored by all healthcare providers is essential to making sure that those providers understand the specific and complex healthcare needs of LGB people.

The Information Strategy emphasises that patient information must be collected and shared safely and securely. Healthcare providers should make sure that they follow a clear confidentiality policy and create a safe, welcoming environment in which LGB people will be comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation.

The Information Centre will make anonymised primary care data from health records and feedback on services available to the public, and to those who are commissioning and designing services. Again, it is important that data on sexual orientation is collected so that the experiences of LGB patients are recognised and

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feed into service improvements.

## What next?

Some of the actions set out in the Information Strategy will be led nationally, by organisations such as the NHS Commissioning Board, the Health and Social Care Information Centre, and Public Health England. Local areas will be encouraged to develop their own solutions under the key themes set out above, so you may find that practice is different in different areas.

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation can offer support and guidance to healthcare providers in monitoring the sexual orientation of their service users. Please let us know of any good and bad practice using the contact details below.

## Further Information

Read the full Information Strategy here: <http://informationstrategy.dh.gov.uk>

If you would like to contact The Lesbian & Gay Foundation you can email [heather.williams@lgf.org.uk](mailto:heather.williams@lgf.org.uk)

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