



Policy: Copying Letters to Patients
Policy number: 4.08

1. Policy Statement

The NHS Plan made a commitment that patients should be able to receive copies of clinicians' letters about them as of right. Letters that could improve a patient's understanding of their health and the care they are receiving form part of the patient-centred care that the hospice aims to deliver.

2. Related policies, guidelines and procedures

Patient Access to Health Records	4.01
Health Records: Management of Patient Records	4.02

3. Responsibility and Accountability

Policy formulation and review:	Emma Allwright, Head of Care Records
Approval:	Helen McGee, Medical Director
Compliance:	All staff and volunteers

4. Relevant Dates

Policy originated:	July 2014
Last Review Date:	Not applicable
This Review Date:	September 2018
Next Review Date:	September 2022

5. What is copying letters about?

Letters written from one health professional to another about a patient following an outpatient consultation, home visit, inpatient admission or episode in hospice day service should be copied to the patient or, where appropriate, nominated relative or carer. This includes: letters to primary care following discharge, outpatient consultation or episode of treatment; letters or forms of referral; letters to other agencies (such as social services, housing, insurance companies).

Raw data

Raw data such as single test results should not normally be sent directly to patients. Such data could include radiology reports or blood results. The outcome of such tests should be included in a future letter that is copied to the patient.

6. Letters should not be copied if:

- Patient has decided not to receive copies of letters and has not given consent.
- It may cause harm to the patient. For example, in cases involving particularly sensitive areas, such as child protection or mental health issues.
- It contains information about a third party who has not given consent

Giving bad news is not in itself enough to justify not copying a letter.

7. Consent to receipt of letters

As part of a new patient consultation, patients should routinely be asked whether they want to receive copies of letters. This is documented on EMIS within the initial patient assessment.

It is sufficient to seek consent just once and explain that copies of letters will routinely be sent unless the patient decides to opt out at a later date. It is good practice to remind the patient each time a letter is to be copied.

8. Copies of letters to relative or carers

A patient may request that their copies of letters are sent to a relative or carer instead of to the patient themselves. At a new patient consultation, patients should be asked if they would prefer to nominate a relative or carer to receive letters in their place. They should be informed that copies of letters will routinely be sent to the nominated individual unless the patient decides otherwise at a later date.

The copy which is sent to the carer or relative should be instead of, and not in addition to, the copy that is sent to the patient. The patient should be informed that it is only possible to nominate one individual to receive copies.

9. Patients who lack capacity

A relative or carer who requests to receive copies of patient letters, for those patients who lack capacity to consent to this process, may only do so if they have been registered as lasting power of attorney.

10. Content of letter

The letter should avoid unnecessarily complex language, acronyms and complex technical terminology which may be misunderstood. Clinical accuracy must be ensured. No subjective statements should be made. The contents of the copied letter should reflect the discussion in the consultation and there should not be any new information in the letter which might distress or surprise the patient.

11. Administration

- Ensure that the patient has consented to receive copies of letters on Inflex.
- Include the text *“Please note that this patient has requested a copy of this letter as part of the ‘Copying Letters to Patients’ initiative”* within the letter.
- Check that the address is correct.
- Mark the envelope confidential.

12. References

1. Department of Health. Copying letters to patients. Good practice guidelines.
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4007561 (accessed online September 2018)
2. The NHS plan. A plan for investment, a plan for reform
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100408023218/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browsable/DH_4112374 (accessed online September 2018)