Online services: repeat prescription management
Guidance for general practice

Why offer online repeat prescription management?

Offering an online repeat prescription management system is a GMS contractual requirement. It offers patient empowerment and helps to fit health services around people’s lives. Patients can request or cancel prescriptions online. The practice then generates prescriptions for collection by the patient or to be sent to designated destinations such as a preferred pharmacy.

This guidance offers support for those practices offering this service. Further guidance from your system supplier about the specific functionality of your system will also help, for example in setting up and configuring the computer system.

The benefits for practices and patients

Benefits for practices

- Practices report reduced administrative burden such as telephone calls.
- Patients can leave a brief message at the time of requesting, therefore potentially saving appointments.
- Patients given access to their medication list online may identify errors within it, as highlighted through recent published evidence.
- Offers the facility to update demographic details such as mobile phone numbers and email addresses.

Benefits for patients

- Offers patients choice. Patients appreciate having different options when it comes to interacting with their practice.
- Patients can order prescriptions at a time convenient to them and see when their medication is due for review.
- Convenient for those who find it difficult to attend the practice e.g. commuters.
- Provides a list of medicines on the screen for ease in requesting.
- Patients also have a messaging function available to them on some systems, with which they can leave a message for the prescriptions clerk, for example asking about specific medications. Apps for modular devices will make access to ordering prescriptions easy and convenient.

Setting up online repeat prescription management

Key considerations in setting up the system include:

- System configuration
- Practice staff training
- Clear protocol for registering new patients to the system
- Promotion of the initiative to patients
- Assessing barriers
- Monitoring and problem solving.
System configuration: planning the new system

- Configure your computer system to accept online repeat prescribing. Your GP system supplier will have published guidance on how to do that in your system and this should be an easy process.
- Consider how the new system could complement existing services and clinical workflows. This includes traditional and other online services.
- Demand management needs to be anticipated and implications for the practice considered.
- Practices already actively using and promoting the online ordering of prescriptions have reported that the uptake of the service can be rapid (e.g. a doubling of the number of patients using the service during its first year of availability) although this is dependent on how much promotion of the service occurs.
- If a patient already has online access, for example to appointments, systems may allow practice staff simply to tick the online repeat prescription functionality for that patient. The next time the patient logs in to the system, they will see their current repeat prescription, and a facility to tick the ones they want to order.
- Consider the involvement of your patient participation group in designing the system.

The roles and training needs of staff

- Identify a lead GP and lead staff member whose role it is to plan, design the system, identify and manage risks, ensure training and monitor the system.
- Ideally ensure that all prescribers in the practice understand what is involved, and support the initiative.
- Staff briefings should include:
  - How the system works
  - How to help patients register
  - How to verify the identity of patients
  - How to support patients with sensory, intellectual or other needs such as limited IT literacy
  - How to identify risk of coercion (please see ‘Special Circumstances’ below)
  - How to manage proxy access (please see ‘Special Circumstances’ below)
  - How to address patient concerns.
Staff briefings should be based on your system supplier’s guidance. System user groups will have helpful tips.

**Registration**
- If patients have not yet registered for any online services, members of the practice staff need to complete the identity verification and registration steps first
- Your system supplier will provide guidance on the registration and account activation process. This may include an SMS reminder option
- Patients new to online access must register in person so that their identity can be verified and they can be given their account details directly. Please refer to the RCGP guidance on Identity Verification at [Identity verification Example practice protocol](#)
- Personal details of how to log in to the online service, including passwords must only be given to the patient themselves, except in specific circumstances (see “Special Circumstances” below for further guidance)
- Once the patient activates the account, the service can be used
- Once your system is agreed, a registration checklist may help receptionists. [Identity verification Getting ready checklist | step-by-step guide](#)

**Promoting and using the new service**
- The usual methods of promoting new practice services should be employed including information on the practice website, on waiting room screens, in practice booklets and newsletters and on prescriptions. Posters in the waiting room may help and the patient participation group may be able to help to spread the word
- To cater for special patient needs large print notices, braille and easy to read material may need to be provided; For further advice about this please visit: [NHS England Accessible Information Standard](#)
- Promotion though the practice existing email system used by patients enables notification that the new facility is starting from a fixed date and can include information on what the new service offers and how it should be used
- Patients should be able to specify where they want their prescriptions to go
- Highlighting that established systems in place such as the need for GP reviews still apply to online requests.

**Barriers to the use of the new service**
- Patients may lack access to the internet or the skills or confidence to use the system. Organisations such as the Tinder Foundation are involved in the NHS programme of widening digital participation by individuals and through community working. The [Tinder Foundation](#) offers help to people with limited digital skills
- Patients may be unaware of the system. Effective promotion of the system is important and may need to be revisited if there is poor uptake
- Problems with registration or account activation may arise because of unsuccessful practice training or briefings or problems with the computer system. Your system provider may offer guidance on this, for example on SMS or email reminders to activate the account
- A careful assessment of the need for further staff training may help overcome low uptake
- Your system supplier’s support team may be able to help if the problems seem to be with your computer system.

**Monitoring the system**
Keep a log of issues with the system – encourage team members and patients to report problems and take action to fix them. Think about how you could make this straightforward for patients.
Special Circumstances

Proxy access

This means access to online GP services by someone other than the patient, on their behalf. This may include people with parental responsibility for a child or carers. Please refer to the Proxy access guidance for general practice.

Patients may choose to share online access login details with family, friends, carers and advocates (including care home staff). If the practice is aware that a patient is considering this course of action, they should make sure that they are aware of the risks associated with doing so. The risk is low especially if the patient is only allowing access for booking appointments. However, there are particular risks of disclosure of an appointment booked or a prescription requested by a Fraser-competent young person. Please visit NSPCC Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines.

Some clinical systems allow patients to see “comments” made by staff when appointments are made and these may be visible to patients booking online. Staff should be alerted to this possibility to avoid inappropriate comments or breaches of confidentiality. Staff also need to be mindful of coercion of the patient (see below).

Coercion

Some patients who use online practice services may be vulnerable to coercion by another person who wants access to their record. In the context of online prescription requests, coercion might result in patients sharing information, against their will, about their prescriptions which may include other private and personal information, or they may be pressurized into ordering medication for someone else under their own name.

All practice staff involved in informing patients about, or registering them for online practice services, must be aware of the potential impact of coercion, and what signs to look out for to identify patients who might be subject to it. For more complete information please refer to Coercion guidance for general practice and e-learning module on coercion.

Further information and resources:

- GMS contractual requirement
- Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) to process and send the prescription to the dispensary.
- Patient Online: The Road Map
- GMC Confidentiality Guidance
- BCS/NHS: Keeping your online health and social care records safe and secure
- NHS England Accessible Information Standard
- NSPCC Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines
- Tinder Foundation
- Identity verification Example practice protocol
- RCGP Guidance Documents
  - Coercion guidance for general practice
  - Identity verification guidance for general practice
  - Proxy access guidance for general practice

Further reading:

- De Lusignan S, Mold F, Sheikh A et al. (BMJ Open 2014): Patients’ online access to their electronic health records and linked online services: a systematic interpretative review