



# Department of Health

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To NHS Trust and Local Authority Chief  
Executives

7 November 2014

Dear Chief Executive

## **New guidance on sharing information for people's direct care and treatment**

We are writing to you today about information sharing and asking you to take action. While protecting the personal information of everyone in the health and care system, whether patients, people who use care and support, staff or carers, is essential, this should not get in the way of sharing information where it is necessary for a person's direct care and treatment. People should be involved in decisions about how their information is used, and all too often are disappointed that they have to repeat information that they thought would be shared with each person involved in their care.

We have also been hearing that health and care practitioners are frustrated about the bureaucratic processes that prevent good sharing, and so we are writing to you directly to ask you to make sure that your organisation's policies and processes support the safe information sharing that is needed to enable excellent care.

We have today published a [leaflet](#) aimed at frontline staff, which makes it clear that sharing and protecting information are not incompatible. We would like you to make sure that this reaches every person in your organisation who may be making information sharing decisions, and that they know that they should seek to share information to support the delivery of excellent care. Where your organisation commissions services from other organisations, you may also wish to share this leaflet with them, and consider how these principles can be embedded in the care you commission.

This guide follows on from Dame Fiona Caldicott's report "To Share or Not to Share"<sup>1</sup> which examined the barriers to appropriate information sharing in some detail and recommended that "*for the purposes of direct care, relevant personal confidential data should be shared among the registered and regulated health and social care professionals who have a legitimate relationship with the individual*". Information sharing is at the heart of the provision of safe, high quality care, and providers are required to co-operate with each other to ensure that care is safe. Good sharing of information is a cornerstone of co-operation, and the Care Quality Commission will be able to take action against providers who are failing to cooperate properly with others.

This guidance is the first document to be developed by the Information Governance Alliance (IGA) and they are seeking feedback on the document. The IGA is a group of national health and care bodies that are working together to improve the quality of health and care services by improving

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-information-governance-review>

information governance. The Alliance will provide a single authoritative source of information and guidance on information governance in health and care and support to front line staff, managers and their organisations to help them handle personal information confidently, and in the best interests of people who use their services. In addition, the Alliance will provide expert advice and develop a knowledge sharing network to help develop the capacity and capability of the information governance profession. The Alliance will be working with a wide range of organisations, networks and staff across the health and care sector to understand their needs, and to inform the Alliance's future priorities. To find out more about the Alliance and help shape its future work, visit [www.hscic.gov.uk/iga](http://www.hscic.gov.uk/iga)

We trust that this guidance will serve as a helpful resource to support your staff to protect and share confidential information in the best interests of the people for whom you provide or commission care.



Dr Daniel Poulter MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health



The Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP  
Minister of State for Care & Support