

# CONNECTED **Instant access to hospital letters**

**An electronic information exchange between a hospital and GPs saves time and money, writes Debbie Wells**

The Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in Cheshire has invested in cutting-edge software to make the working lives of both its medical secretaries and the GPs it serves easier.

The Medisec clinical correspondence system automatically generates clinic attendance and discharge notification letters, and sends them electronically to 43 GP practices in West Cheshire and North Wales.

GPs can browse a secure website to see past and future outpatient appointments online, past clinic attendance notes and outpatient letters for any of their patients. The system also gives GPs instant access to real-time clinical patient information, including radiology and A&E reports.

#### Follow-up

Dr David Morris, from St Mark's Dee View Surgery in Flintshire, explains: 'A patient can potentially be seen at the Countess in the morning and visit us for follow-up care the next day and we will be up-to-speed with their condition, any medication they may be on and developments at the hospital.'

The service is supported by daily discharge bulletins which tell GPs when their patients are leaving the hospital. When practice staff visit the website, they can tell at a glance what sort of letter it is and how they should code, file and manage it within the surgery.

GPs can view letters individually or download them in bulk for processing. As well as



Dr David Morris: 'The system saves me about two weeks a year — and it is reassuring for the patients'

reducing delivery times, it also means that no letters are lost.

'Medisec has cut our paper-handling costs significantly,' says Dr Morris.

'We no longer have to spend time scanning in documents and we can manipulate text easily by copying and pasting. This reduces the need to re-input patient details and the associated chance of error.'

'The ability to view future hospital appointments also allows diligent GPs to ensure that an ill patient will definitely be seen soon enough, and if not, to chase it up.'

The software allows GPs to make fast, secure electronic patient referrals to the hospital for outpatients and radiology. The hospital currently receives about 2,500 electronic referrals every month.

**Patients love seeing the flash confirming that the hospital server has received the referral, before they leave the room**

Dr David Morris

Standardised Word document templates produce accurate correspondence with all the required information. For example, while a general ward admission will only need a synopsis of the latest problems, medications, family history, and allergies, more complex cases will rely on additional specific clinical data.

As the template system includes the results of tests already carried out by the GP, it eliminates wasteful duplication of tests in hospital.

GPs send referrals by hitting the 'Send to Medisec' button appearing in the toolbar of Microsoft Word. An alert message is automatically generated to confirm delivery.

Dr Morris makes about 25 electronic referrals a month. 'The patient can see a message

flash up confirming the hospital has received the referral while they are still in my consulting room. It reassures both of us,' he explains.

#### Efficient process

The system provides the hospital with case-management tools and workflow facilities to enable referrals to be processed efficiently and provide safe storage and a full audit capability. It picks up the referral in the hospital and either associates it with the correct patient — if they are already in the master patient index — or triggers a new registration if this will be their first visit.

The software provides a slick way of speeding up the patient pre-registration process by providing semi-automatic entry into the PAS system, using colour coding to identify individual case status. Files turn from orange to pink to red as time passes to highlight those cases which still need processing, in time for when the patient calls to set up their appointment the following day.

Dr Morris estimates the software saves him at least 30 minutes every day — about two weeks a year.

'The real point of Medisec is that it makes the patient's hospital record — or at least, enough components of it to be a very worthwhile proxy — accessible to many users, at many locations,' he says. 'It's reliable, clinician-friendly and fully integrated with Vision, our GP system. It's also supported by local IT people who respond quickly.'