

TheBigOptOut.org

For immediate release – 16/12/06

Ministers' offer of patient opt-out is just spin, says TheBigOptOut.org

TheBigOptOut.org launched a campaign on the 29th November to get patients to opt out of having their medical information uploaded to the NHS 'Spine'.

On Monday an NHS taskforce chaired by 'patient tsar' Harry Cayton will publish recommendations on the extent to which patients can opt out. This is being spun as a victory for patients and the press. However the opt-out mechanism that software companies have been told to implement is deceptive. GPs will first transfer all patient records to a 'hosting centre' run by government contractors. Summary records of all patients will then be generated and transferred to central systems. Finally, a blank record will be created in respect of each patient who has opted out, and this will also be uploaded to central systems to indicate that the patient has opted out.

Patients who have used the opt-out letter on the TheBigOptOut.org's website have not just forbidden their GPs to share sensitive information with the Department of Health, but also to inform the Department that information has been withheld. GPs who follow ministers' proposals will be breaking patient privacy.

Said Helen Wilkinson, National Coordinator of TheBigOptOut.org, 'So long as Ministers continue to demand that all GP records will be kept at hosting centres under government control, the opt-out is a joke.'

Said Dr Paul Thornton, a GP and HIV/AIDS expert, 'We have won the ethical, legal and political argument. But we have had weasel words from Ministers and Harry Cayton in this regard before. Look past their spin at the detail. Will civil servants have access to your sensitive medical data, and who will they be able to share them with?'

-ENDS-

Notes for editors

1. In November 2006, a Medix poll showed that 52% of GPs did not plan to upload their patients' data without prior consent – just 13% said they would upload without any consent at all. A Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust survey released in the same month showed that 53% of patients oppose 'Requiring everyone's medical records to be stored in a centralised database for access by civil servants and government officials, with no right to opt out'. Just 27% of the public were in favour.

2. The Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, angered doctors by asking them to shop dissenting patients to the Department, in breach of patients' privacy.

3. Lord Warner, the minister responsible for the NHS IT disaster, has just resigned.

Contact: Helen Wilkinson on 01494 882458 (office) or 07733 346778 (mobile)