

4Ps

Development programmes for people in healthcare

Letter sharing, contents notes

Overview of the initiative - copying letters to patients

What is required?

What constitutes a letter?

What are must dos?

Key messages

- letter sharing is a very powerful form of involvement
- negative attitudes stem from paternalism which afflicts patients' groups, secretaries and managers as well as doctors, and from fears about workload and making a mistake
- once doctors accept partnership and give patients permission, the new relationship proves very positive for both sides
- it's OK to start with the easy bits and build up.

Main practical points

- don't let anxiety about potential risks put you off. The risks are low and the vast majority of patients who want a letter should not be deprived of it because of institutional cowardice
- the policy should be interpreted to suit individual clinicians and their patients: dictate, tapes, handling technical detail etc
- consent needs to be made as simple as possible; preferably opt-out.

Other practical points

- no new information!
- plain English – but most letters require little change in style
- consider templates
- consider back-up sources of information
- there is some workload for secretarial staff
- mistakes will be made but they are unlikely to be serious
- training for staff in dictation and in letter-writing
- children, carers, translation, therapeutic tool
- empowered patients may start asking other, awkward questions (Alder Hay).



If doing a presentation on lettersharing

1. Introduction

Who shares letters already?

First-hand and second-hand experience

2. Why copy letters?

Because it's good for patients and it's good for doctors

Bristol; NHS Plan

Why is it good for patients?

Because you can't remember much of any consultation

Because it involves you

Because you can take part in the decisions made about you

Why is it good for doctors?

Involved informed patients leads to better health care

Patients more likely to take responsibility

Because patients appreciate it

As part of the therapeutic dialogue

Why is it good for Trusts?

Letter sharing is a powerful form of involvement; meets the PPI obligations

Requirement from April 2004

3. Pull out group's issues

4. Discussion

Of issues, raise anything major not raised, Q&A

5. Take-home message

It isn't difficult, it is worthwhile, think long enough not to make big mistakes but not so long that you get bogged down. Experience and support is available and appreciation is almost 100% guaranteed.

Further information on www.4Ps.com/lettersharing/index.htm

Tip: anticipate your audience, pull out a few quotable quotes and top tips from website.