

# 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).

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### **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](http://www.4Ps.com/lettersharing/index.htm)

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