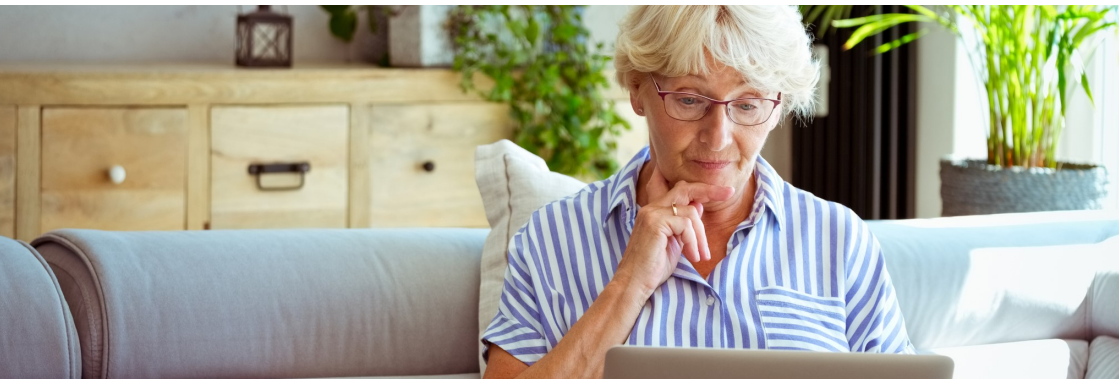




## ARC West

# DECODE: Unintended consequences of online access to health records

2023



### **Giving patients online access to their GP health records has unintended consequences that can limit its usefulness.**

NHS England have given patients access to their electronic medical records.

The intention behind online access is to give patients greater control of their health, while making care more efficient and helping reduce general practice workload.

#### **What was the aim of the project?**

We wanted to understand the consequences of patient online access to

their health records in primary care, especially as some of these consequences may have been unintended.

Understanding both the positive and negative impact of patients accessing their health records online is vital to help improve how these services are used and provided in the future.

#### **What did we do?**

In 2019, our researchers interviewed 13 patients and 19 general practice staff across 10 general practices with experience of patient online access to health records, in South West and North West England.



## How did we involve people?

The project team included two members of the public who helped develop the analysis and interpret the findings.

We discussed findings with GPs, practice managers and policymakers, to distil them into guidance on avoiding unintended consequences of patient access to health records.

## What did we learn?

Some patients found online access to their health records a convenient way for patients to view their health care information and equipped patients to ask more questions in future consultations.



In some cases, being able to view one's health record can have negative consequences. Online access negatively impacted some patients' understanding of their health. For example, if patients discovered information that was surprising or difficult to interpret.

Online access also has unintended consequences for general practices, affecting how GPs write their notes. Sometimes, this could help patients when the record was easier to understand. In other cases, it negatively impacted the quality of the record.

Contrary to assumptions that practice workload would be reduced, online access could also introduce extra work for practices. This included preparing records for sharing, prepare patients about what to expect from their records, managing and monitoring access.

It is crucial that practices are adequately supported and resourced to manage the unintended consequences of online record access to prevent possible harm to patients.

## Read the paper by Turner et al. **Unintended consequences of patient online access to health records: a qualitative study in UK primary care**

Published in British Journal of General Practice

<http://bit.ly/3RXPAAJ>

## What is NIHR ARC West?

At the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West, we conduct applied health research with our partners and others in the health and care sector, alongside patients and members of the public. Applied health research aims to address the immediate issues facing the health and social care system. We also help bring research evidence into practice and

provide training for the local workforce.

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