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PPSA Local Bulletin, Number 11_2012

To: GP Practices

Subject: Adoption process – Guidance for GP Practices

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Date: 16 July 2012

The PPSA has received the following guidance from NHS Connecting for Health and the National Back Office (NBO) regarding the handling of medical records for adopted children.

When a legal adoption has taken place, the NBO is notified by the General Register Office. This is routinely undertaken by their forwarding a copy of the Court Order to the NBO. The NBO subsequently invalidates the adoptee's original PDS record which was created in the child's pre-adoptive details. A new PDS record is created by the NBO using the post-adoptive details as provided on the Court Order.

The NBO then notifies the appropriate NHAIS Agency of the adoption via their NBO NHSmail address requesting that they cancel the original registration as A/C and add the newly allocated NHS number to the ID screen on its database¹. It is also important the new PDS record is updated with the GP's details.

Current adoption legislation requires that all adopted children are given a new NHS number, and that all previous medical information relating to the child is put into a newly created health record. Any information relating to the identity or whereabouts of the birth parents should not be included in the new record. The change of name, NHS number and transfer of previous health information into a new health record should take place for both GP records and hospital records.

Whilst changing or omitting information from medical records would usually be contrary to ethical and professional guidance, this is not the case for the records of adopted children as there is a legal requirement that it takes place.

The following information which has been approved by the IG Policy team within the Department of Health may be of assistance:

¹ The information about the required cancellation and the new registration are sent as separate notifications to avoid linking between the old and new records.

Patient staying with the same GP

- The pre-adoptive Medical Record should remain with the GP.
- A new Medical Record envelope should be provided with the patient's new NHS number and other post-adoptive details. The old notes can then be placed in the new envelope.
- The GP must not make any changes that conceal or alter the patient's clinical history. However, steps must be taken to prevent disclosure of their pre-adoptive identity, perhaps blocking out all references to the previous name and any information that may identify members of the birth family.
- The pre-adoptive identity should be regarded as confidential and the GP Practice must ensure that they have robust systems in place to manage disclosure and/or access.
- It is good practice for the GP to place a label on the front of the new Medical Record stating "Confidential Patient Data – take care on disclosure of information" or some other such message.
- If possible, electronic Medical Records should be merged on the GP Practice system in the new post-adoptive details. GP Practice staff should seek guidance from their system supplier on how to manage this.

Patient is changing GP practice and moving area

- The pre-adoptive Medical Record should be requested from the GP and held in the 'withdrawn' file at the current NHAIS PCT/Agency.
- The Adoptions Agency dealing with the case should arrange for the relevant GP (or PCT/Agency) to forward a summary of the patient's medical history or the entire Medical Record.
- The GP must not make any changes that conceal or alter the patient's clinical history. However, steps must be taken to prevent disclosure of their pre-adoptive identity, perhaps blocking out all references to the previous name and any information that may identify members of the birth family.
- The pre-adoptive identity should be regarded as confidential and the GP Practice must ensure that they have robust systems in place to manage disclosure and/or access.
- It is good practice for the GP to place a label on the front of the new Medical Record stating "Confidential Patient Data – take care on disclosure of information" or some other such message.