

Did you know that about 1.3 million paper prescriptions are issued every working day in England, with this figure set to rise by over 5% each year? And that about 70% of prescriptions are repeats?

To handle this volume more efficiently, the NHS is introducing an Electronic Prescription Service.

In time, this service will allow your prescription to be sent electronically from your GP to the pharmacy of your choice. This will mean improved service, convenience and accuracy.

The service is being introduced in two stages.

The first stage

Adding a barcode

In the first stage you will still receive a paper prescription in the way you do now. The only change you will see will be that your prescription will have a barcode and some numbers down the right-hand side.

These provide a unique reference for your prescription but they don't hold any personal information about you. They are only there to help the pharmacist dispense the items on your prescription more easily.

The new service will be more accurate, as the prescription information won't have to be re-typed into the computer at the pharmacy.

This first stage of the Electronic Prescription Service has been designed to make sure that everything works efficiently before we introduce the full version of the service. So, for now, the way you collect your prescriptions or medicines won't change.

We will let you know when your GP surgery or pharmacy is moving to the second stage of the service.

The second stage

Nominating a preferred pharmacy

Sometime between the middle of 2006 and the end of 2007, each GP surgery and pharmacy will move to the second stage of the service.

You will be able to ask your GP to send your prescription to a pharmacy of your choice electronically, so you won't need a paper prescription at all – unless you want to have one.

This may save you time by reducing how often you have to visit your GP surgery simply to collect a paper prescription. In future, you will be able to go straight to the pharmacy to pick up your medicines.

As well as increased convenience for patients, this second stage of the service will also bring substantial improvements in efficiency for GPs, pharmacists and their staff.

Some common questions

How will I obtain my prescriptions?

During the first stage, in the same way as you do now. During the second stage there will be some changes to make it easier for you. Your GP surgery will tell you about these when they happen.

Will I still be able to use any pharmacy I want?

Yes, you will always be able to use any pharmacy. You will still have the option of collecting a paper version of your prescription from your GP and taking it to any pharmacy.

Will I need to know anything about computers to use the service?

No, your GP and pharmacist will be the people using computers to provide a better service for you.

Who will see my prescription?

The same people who can see it now. Whether information is on paper or electronic, everyone involved with your prescription has a legal duty to keep information about you confidential.

Will this affect prescriptions I receive from people other than my GP?

No, not yet. We intend to include prescriptions given by other people such as dentists, nurses and hospital doctors eventually but we are concentrating on GPs and pharmacists first.

More information

Is there anything else I should know?

The Electronic Prescription Service is being implemented gradually to give everyone time to get used to the new arrangements.

Paper prescriptions are only being phased out slowly. Even when the Electronic Prescription Service is fully implemented a paper version of your prescription will continue to be available if you need one.

Over time, many people will see considerable benefit from the new Electronic Prescription Service.

More information is available from www.cfh.nhs.uk/eps or you can ask at your GP surgery or pharmacy.

To request further copies of this leaflet please visit www.cfh.nhs.uk/publications or call 08453 700760 quoting item reference number 2178. This leaflet is also available in other languages and formats.

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Moving from paper to electronic prescriptions

A guide for patients and carers

