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# ePHARMACY

All four countries which make up the United Kingdom are currently embarked on implementing a solution for 'Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions' (ETP). Whilst there is no single solution across the home nations, or indeed the wider health services in Europe and beyond, all countries are striving towards the goal of improving patient care by prescribing and dispensing electronically.

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Scotland is taking a lead in the field of ePharmacy as highlighted in The Right Medicine, the Scottish Government's (formerly the Scottish Executive) strategy for pharmaceutical care in Scotland. Strong experience in delivery of IT solutions in health has led to the Atos Origin Alliance being contracted, through NHS National Services Scotland (NHS NSS), to work with the Scottish Government to support the initiative. Read on to hear how ePharmacy has progressed to the benefit of all health service stakeholders – not least the patients themselves – and about the Atos Origin Alliance's pivotal role in the success of the programme.

## The Right Medicine

Over 75 million paper prescriptions are processed in Scotland annually for medicines and appliances, with a reimbursement cost of £860 million. It is hardly surprising then that, as the Scottish Government applies itself to the use of ICT to improve patient care services; this has been seen as a priority area for delivery.

Nationally implemented solutions have replaced pilot schemes, and are already improving the business process with an infrastructure of IT supporting the introduction of new services (such as the Minor Ailment Service, in live use since July 2006). When 'The Right Medicine' paper was published in 2002, the ePharmacy programme was formed to enable development of e-applications that would support the future implementation of the new community pharmacy contract in Scotland.

As NHSScotland's IT partner, and having previously worked on ETP systems in England, the Atos Origin Alliance was able to provide focused input to that process and help the Scottish Government to avoid the potential pitfalls involved in such a leading edge undertaking.

## Stakeholder benefits

When fully operational in 2009, ePharmacy will deliver across the following four service areas:

- Minor Ailment Service (MAS) – management of minor ailments on the NHS by community pharmacists
- Acute Medication Service (AMS) – provision of pharmaceutical care services for acute prescriptions
- Chronic Medication Service (CMS) – a system of personalised pharmaceutical care to patients with long term medical conditions
- Public Health Service (PHS) – supporting the pharmacist role in health improvement and medicine safety.

The potential benefits are substantial. For example, the MAS, which was rolled-out nationally on 1 July 2006, means that patients who are exempt from paying prescription charges go straight to the community pharmacy with whom they are registered and receive a consultation possibly resulting in the prescribing and dispensing of medication for their common condition. This then eliminates the need to visit their GP.

CMS will deliver the management of repeat medication and shared patient care for long term medical conditions between the GP, pharmacist and patient on the basis of one electronic authorisation from the GP. Professional supervision will be provided in the pharmacy where the patient is registered with information being regularly fed back to the GP. The GP will utilise this electronic information from the pharmacy (alongside their own information) to review the patient's care on a six or 12 monthly basis.
These two examples save the patient, the GP, and the pharmacist time and trouble not to mention mountains of paper.

The efficiency improvements possible from an ePharmacy approach are significant too. At the centre, the keying of data from over 75 million paper prescriptions are significantly reduced, and the automation of associated payment systems again reduces administrative processes.

The completion of the end-to-end delivery of AMS (ETP) in every GP Practice and Pharmacy in Scotland was a major milestone for the epharmacy programme and the NHS in Scotland in 2008. Improved patient care and safety have resulted and made the processing of prescriptions more efficient via the use of the electronic data.

## Systems Integration across the service

In systems terms, the accent has been upon developing a generic architecture and infrastructure was developed, centred around the ePharmacy Message Store. This controls encrypted messages between GP and community pharmacy systems, and NHS NSS, which owns and supports the service including the national registration and payment systems.

The ePharmacy programme represents a real partnership between the Atos Origin Alliance, NHS NSS and the Scottish Government Health Department to name but a few. The solutions ideas, developed from business service trials, are shared with GPs, pharmacists and representative bodies prior to development. This ensures that solutions take into account 'real world' clinical processes and working practice.

## Valuable lessons

Our role is to manage the overall ePharmacy delivery programme in partnership with NHS NSS. This includes project structure, supplier coordination, 'Fit for Purpose' testing of GP and Pharmacy systems and delivery phasing – as well as providing the ePharmacy Message Store functionality and designing the interfaces for systems that must communicate with that store. We also host, manage and support the ePharmacy Message Store servers. As with all such successful ICT-based health service systems, ePharmacy is founded on clinical practice based processes, proven in trials, supported and underpinned by technology solutions.

As a case study into the benefits of a considered approach to change management systems integration, real delivery of a step change to support a national initiative – the Scottish Government's ePharmacy programme has a lot of valuable lessons for the NHS in Scotland and other parts of the UK.

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