



An Electronic Prescribing Service in Wales

The Primary Care Services are delivering an Electronic Prescription Service in Wales

Background

Currently in Wales, GPs and other prescribers in primary care, such as community pharmacists, dentists and optometrists, sign paper prescriptions by hand. The prescription forms are then given to the patient to take to the pharmacy, or the forms are delivered from a GP practice to the pharmacy for medications to be dispensed.

Building on the earlier roll out of the Electronic Prescription Service in NHS England, the introduction of the Primary Care Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) in partnership with Digital Health Care Wales will make the process of prescription forms electronic in Wales.



What happened?

More than 80 million items were prescribed in GP surgeries and dispensed in the community in Wales in 2021, and £963.6 million was spent on prescribing medicines in Wales in 2021.

The Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) allows prescribers to send prescriptions electronically to dispenser (such as a pharmacy) of the patient's choice. This makes the prescribing and dispensing process safer, more efficient, and convenient for patients and staff.

The programme has gone live in November 2023 with one GP practice and one Pharmacy, both are located close together in Rhyl. This is being rolled out to 375 GP practices and approximately 700 community pharmacies across Wales.

To achieve this, staff had to identify requirements for system development, understand the impact to current business processes and staff affected by this change. The project has been active for over a year, and it will be ongoing for at least another 12 months. A weekly project team meeting is held and also collaboration with NHS England, Digital Health Care Wales and Community Pharmacy Wales.

What positive outcomes have been achieved?

- ✓ The reduction of physical prescriptions needing to be collected by courier from each pharmacy and the documents scanned in by the Document Scanning Team in Primary Care Services. As the electronic prescription service is rolled out, these physical prescriptions will decrease and reduce our carbon footprint.
- ✓ With the Electronic Prescription Service patients will no longer have to attend a surgery just to collect a prescription form. Instead, they will be able to say to their GP which pharmacy they would like to collect their medicines from, and the prescription will be sent there electronically.
- ✓ GPs and other prescribers will be able to sign prescriptions digitally which will be more efficient, freeing up time for patient care.
- ✓ Dispensers will have the opportunity, through changing practice, to reduce the use of paper and provide a more efficient service to patients.
- ✓ It will enable the safer management of repeat medication and greater data security.
- ✓ There will be benefits to the prescriptions processing staff and document scanning staff as they will be able to learn new skills as electronic prescription processing increases. The teams have improved working relationships as they now meet each week at project meetings and have gained an understanding of the other services teams provide and where they fit in the overall picture.
- ✓ The use of improved technology to support the programme has provided a more robust prescription process. This project would not have been implemented successfully without NWSSP working in collaboration with NHS England and Digital Health Care Wales (DHCW).

What lessons were learned?

- ✓ We mustn't compromise our agreed testing window if there is a slippage. For the first site, the testing window decreased from 4 weeks to 2, which significantly impacted the team in order to turn things around as we still had to achieve the go-live date. We still received some test claims after we went live, which compromised the data.
- ✓ An improved communication strategy to ensure all teams are kept in the loop on what's going on. There has been a mixed approach between the project team in Digital Health Care Wales (DHCW), The Primary Care team in DHCW and Primary Care Services. It has resulted in a disjointed approach and is not great for the pharmacy and General Practice.

Next steps for progression:

In the next 12 months, we will roll out to more pharmacy system suppliers and GP's.

We will deliver a training programme to staff within Transaction Services, to deliver the Smartcards required for rollout and process prescriptions with the new system changes.

We will continue to improve efficiencies within the prescription processing teams including increasing automation and will be undertaking an impact assessment on staff and resources required.