Use of NHS Number in prison healthcare

NHS Number is now available for use in all prisons in England.

Although the use of NHS Number is not mandated, the provision of healthcare can be streamlined by the use of NHS Number, especially when a prisoner requires secondary care (e.g. hospital treatment). Many prisoners with complex health needs cannot always be dealt with solely by prison health teams and will require NHS treatment.

Additionally, using a single identifier allows continuity of care for the patient from when they arrive in prison, to when they return back to the community. The use of the NHS Number therefore enables prison health teams to ensure prisoners have a single, detailed and continuous healthcare record.

This guidance has been published in the wake of a joint piece of work between the NHS Number team and the Offender Health IT programme, and includes:

- A best practice guide for tracing NHS Numbers in prisons.
- A case study on how NHS Number supports continuity of care at HMP Lewes.
- A set of FAQs on use of NHS Number within prisons.

Tracing an NHS Number for patients within prisons

There are a couple of methods for tracing an NHS Number for a patient and entering it onto TPP SystmOne Prison.

Paper documents

Paper documents likely to include an NHS Number for a patient include a hospital appointment letter, a GP record, a prescription or a label on a patient’s medication.

If you are certain that the NHS Number included on these types of document is for the patient, you should always enter that NHS Number onto the patient’s clinical record on TPP SystmOne Prison. The system will check that the format and length of the number is correct and so reduce the possibility of mis-keying the number. However it is always a good idea to double-check the number to ensure it is correct.

If you do not receive any documentation when the patient first arrives in the prison, as part of the registration process you should - subject to the patient’s consent - attempt to contact their GP practice for a summary of their record and their NHS Number.
Summary Care Record application (SCRa)

The SCRa is a secure internet portal by which patient information held on the NHS Spine can be accessed.

Using a patient’s basic demographics – e.g. their name, date of birth and gender - you can use the SCRa to trace important information such as their NHS Number and registered GP practice.

This can be done as part of the patient registration process, when the patient is available to confirm the correct details, or it can be done as a ‘back office’ function after registration without the patient being present. Prisons already doing this estimate that the process takes about two minutes per patient.

To use the SCRa you will need to be provided with an NHS ‘chip and pin’ smartcard and given access to the application.

Entering the NHS Number onto TPP SystmOne Prison

Entering an NHS Number onto a record is very simple. It can be done during the registration process on the ‘New Patient Details’ screen under the ‘Prison Number’ or it can be added to the record after registration has been completed.

When the number is added to the record TPP SystmOne Prison will check that the length and format of the number are correct, so reducing the possibility of mis-keying. However, the system will not check that the NHS Number entered is correct against the patient name and date of birth etc.

This extra validation is something that will be introduced over time. Extra care must therefore be taken to ensure that the NHS Number you are adding to a record is the correct one for the patient in question.

Case study - NHS Number supports continuity of care at HMP Lewes

HMP Lewes has been highly proactive in incorporating prisoner’s NHS Numbers within TPP SystmOne Prison. This has enabled the healthcare team to deal more effectively with secondary care services.

Prisoners are usually identified by their P-NOMIS number, which is supplied to them when they enter prison.

Everyone who is registered with the NHS in England and Wales has their own unique NHS Number, which helps healthcare staff to find health records. Each NHS Number is made up of 10 digits shown in a 3-3-4 format, usually as follows (example only):

9 4 3 4 7 6 5 9 1 9

Business and support manager Denise Bowden says the NHS Number is becoming an increasingly important tool in providing continuity of care for prisoners.

“Hospitals in the area are now specifically asking for an NHS Number when treating patients. Now that we have a majority of prisoners’ NHS Numbers stored
within TPP SystmOne Prison, the process for getting appointments in secondary care is a lot easier for us.”

It’s often the case that prisoners with complex health needs or multiple long-term conditions cannot be treated solely by the prison healthcare team. Providing an NHS Number for prisoners like these enables staff treating them in other healthcare locations to correctly identify the individuals, find information about their healthcare and identify any multiple records. NHS Number therefore supports the effective link-up of healthcare information from when prisoners arrive in prison, to when they return back to the community.

“The NHS Number provides us with another method of identifying prisoners’ medical information and gives us another identifier to make sure that we have the right person,” states Denise. “Many prisoners have multiple records so by using the NHS Number we have been able to check the information for accuracy and merge it into one record.”

The use of the NHS Number has therefore enabled the team to ensure prisoners have a single, detailed and continuous healthcare record.

The healthcare team at HMP Lewes has been using the SCRa to trace NHS Numbers using any known demographics (surname, date of birth and gender) of the prisoners, and matching these up with their home addresses or registered GP practices.

“As we have a high turnover of prisoners, we decided to enter all the NHS Numbers over a weekend,” says Denise. “This was completed by our administrative team. We were not working at full capacity at the time due to the refurbishments work on one of our wings, which made the timing ideal for us.”

“One of the issues that we came across was with prisoners that already had their NHS Number within the SystmOne system. When we tried to add their NHS Number to the record, it would not allow us to do so.”

Other prisons which have begun to enter NHS Numbers onto prison healthcare records within TPP SystmOne Prison have encountered the same issue. This is most likely to occur when the same patient has been registered onto TPP SystmOne in another care setting, such as at their GP.

The issue has been formally raised to the system suppliers of TPP SystmOne Prison. The Offender Health IT programme team is working with them to identify an appropriate solution.

“It was a big piece of work for the team to get all the NHS Numbers assigned to the correct prisoners but the result has meant an overall reduction in administrative time,” Denise comments. “We now search for a prisoner’s NHS Number as soon as they arrive here at the prison.

“We also feel that by adopting the NHS Number we are in a good position to take advantage of future developments of the system, particularly some of the services that could be available to us once we are able to connect to the ‘spine’.
Frequently asked questions

Am I allowed to use an NHS smartcard in prison?

It has been agreed by the Offender Health IT programme and the National Offender Management Service that the use of NHS smartcards by healthcare staff who are delivering services on behalf of the NHS does not represent a potential security risk.

However, some members of staff who work in vulnerable areas have been given smartcard holders in the past. These are not permitted as they contain telecommunication SIM cards, which are not allowed in prisons. A formal communication on this subject has been issued to regional Registration Authority leads and prison governors: http://nww.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/prisonhealth/guidance/Smartcard-comms.pdf

I do not currently have an NHS smartcard. Should I have one and who do I contact to request one?

All staff delivering healthcare services for, or on behalf of, the NHS should have a ‘chip and pin’ smartcard to access information systems where possible. Smartcards not only improve the level of security required to access systems but, if authorised, will also allow you to access services and systems that will help the healthcare team trace NHS Numbers for your patients.

To request your smartcard and the ability to trace NHS Numbers contact your local Registration Authority Manager or local IT helpdesk.

When I make a referral for a patient in prison to a hospital or any other service outside the prison, should I always include an NHS Number on the referral?

An NHS Number enables healthcare providers outside the prison to quickly and easily identify a patient as it is a unique identifier.

NHS Numbers should therefore be used wherever possible. If a patient’s NHS Number is not available and cannot be traced, however, this should not delay you from making a necessary referral.

If we cannot trace an NHS Number for a patient in prison, should we attempt to create one for them?

Your local data quality department will be able to advise you if it has a service that is able to allocate NHS Numbers to patients.

What should I do if TPP SystmOne Prison won’t allow me to add an NHS Number onto a patient’s record?

Incidents like this should always be logged with your local helpdesk. It will then be raised directly with TPP who will investigate and provide you with a response.

It is already known that patients in prison who already have a record held on TPP SystmOne outside of the prison environment, e.g. with a GP or community service, cannot be allocated a duplicate NHS Number. This prevents community and prison patient records being merged.

A solution to this problem is being developed.

For more information about Offender Health IT, please visit our website at: http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/offender