

A PATIENT SAFETY INITIATIVE

INTRODUCING THE INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IDENTIFIER

– YOUR OWN “DIGITAL KEY”

WHEN you visit a healthcare practitioner, you embark upon a journey. This may be a brief trip to the GP for some advice and perhaps a medical prescription or it might turn into a lengthier journey with referrals to different parts of the healthcare system.

Whoever your healthcare practitioner is, and in whatever setting you are seen, one of the most important things in order to deliver the right care at the right time is that you, as the patient, are uniquely identified.

This is the key function of the new Individual Health Identifier (IHI). Your IHI is generated by the HSE using information about you as set out in the Health Identifiers Act 2014. This information will include your name, address, date of birth, etc. The IHI will not hold any of your health information and should not be confused with an electronic health record (EHR) which would gather all of your health records into one file; the IHI is there to identify you.

Existing information systems in the Irish health

and social care services need the IHI to help them identify you as a unique individual. At some stage future IT connectivity and new developments, for example the proposed Electronic Health Record (EHR), will rely upon the IHI as the cornerstone for unique and safe identification of patients.

This means the risks of information not following you from your GP to the hospital, will be greatly reduced; the chances of using the wrong patient record, delivering the wrong care, prescribing the wrong medicine or performing the wrong procedure will be minimised.

The development of the new IHI required legislation to protect everyone's data and ensure the security of the system. The Health Identifiers Act 2014 was the first step in the creation of an IHI for Ireland and describes exactly what the IHI record for every person who uses the health services is allowed to contain.

The HSE has been given the job of building and operating the IHI Register of unique health identifiers that will be used across health and

social care services in the State. Personal data will be held safely and securely in the IHI Register and only used within the health and social care system to accurately identify you, using data such as your name, date of birth, mother's maiden name, etc.

The IHI record itself contains no medical data, just personal data to uniquely identify you as an individual. IHI records will be created, stored and used with the utmost confidentiality and security. Your individual personal data is private and will not be shared with anybody outside of the health and social care system. IHI records will only be seen by the relevant healthcare staff at the point of patient care.

An IHI will be generated and assigned automatically to your existing health and social care records. In time, the IHI will be connected to the Maternity and Newborn Clinical Management Systems (MN-CMS) which will allow for the IHI to be generated at birth. The IHI number will be used in the background to identify you



and enable healthcare systems to identify your unique records so that we can provide healthcare services to you at the right time, giving safe and timely treatment. You will never need to know or have your IHI to access services as it is just an identifier within the health and social services (but it can be provided upon written request to the IHI Business Service). The IHI programme is committed to keeping your information safe and secure and an IHI Privacy Impact Assessment was opened to public consultation earlier in 2016 (the results of which can be seen on www.ehealthireland.ie/Strategic-Programmes/IHI/).

As the IHI is implemented in existing and new healthcare information technology systems across Ireland's health and social care services in the coming years, it will allow you to be identified uniquely and will increase patient safety benefits.

What does this mean for me, as a health service staff member?

At the point where a patient registers with a health or social care provider, the IHI will become a key process for patient identification. Patient administration systems will be tailored to incorporate automatic look-up of the IHI for each new or return patient who presents to your service. In the event that a patient is not automatically allocated an IHI, this will not prevent their access to health or social care services. The IHI Business Service will process the new request in the background to generate a unique IHI for that patient.

It will take several years for the IHI to be fully implemented in Ireland. There are many thousands of points where patients connect with health and social care services and the IHI Project will be implemented in each location over the course of time. Each site will be supported to identify and communicate with staff that need to use the IHI number for their patients. Initial pilot sites will start in both community and hospital based locations through 2016 / 2017 and, building upon the experience from these pilots, the roll-out will continue in a managed way across the entire health and social care system. Already most European countries, along with Australia, Singapore and the United States, are benefitting from this system and we can learn from their experiences, of how best to introduce the IHI for maximum patient safety benefits.

As the IHI implementation spreads across the



Irish health and social care system, staff will begin to see IHI numbers appearing on patient records or correspondence between healthcare providers. The subsequent implementation of the IHI in existing national systems such as HealthLink / eReferrals, National Integrated Medical Imaging System (NIMIS) and the National Laboratory Information System (MedLIS) will spread the use of the IHI across the services. Local systems such as GP practice management systems and hospital patient administration systems will be added on a continual basis as we work through the phased roll-out. The IHI is a cornerstone of the eHealth strategy across public (both statutory and voluntary), and private health and social care services. With each phase of the roll-out careful consideration will be given to existing work practices of health service staff who are involved in patient identification, in order to minimise any extra workload.

In most cases, the IHI will be automatically added to patient records without requiring much, if any, intervention from staff. The pilot approach adopted by the IHI Project will ensure that staff training materials are offered wherever needed. We are embarking on a programme of work that is estimated could take several years to be fully embedded in every health and social care service.

We are taking a programmed approach and adding locations continually. We look forward to working with staff, GPs, and key agencies to build the IT platform

that will improve the safety of our services.

From our patient's perspective the IHI will be transparent, working away in the background to assure health and social care staff that our patients are correctly and uniquely identified. Our patients will not need to know their IHI any more than they need to know other internal health service reference numbers such as their Medical Record Number (MRN). However as mentioned earlier, anyone can apply in writing to get a copy of their IHI number, the IHI Business Service will gladly provide an individual with their IHI.

The IHI is a key to the success of safe, integrated health and social care for tomorrow and the future. We will keep you updated on new pilot programmes and progress over the coming months and years.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information, including YouTube video is available at: www.ehealthireland.ie/Strategic-Programmes/IHI/