

Public attitudes to patient data use

A summary of existing research



How to use this slide deck

This deck summarises published literature on UK public attitudes towards the use of health and patient data for research purposes (as at July 2018).

Please feel free to use any of the findings and statistics referenced, but do credit them appropriately. Links to all reports and papers are in the Appendix.

Note the study context, scale and methodology when citing statistics. Figures alone can be misleading, and it is important to be aware of the questions asked, sample sizes and any methodological limitations.

Be wary of 'cherry-picking' statistics: there is no such thing as 'the public' and care should be taken when generalising about people's views. People's attitudes are rarely fixed and do not always represent particular demographics, or apply equally across different contexts.



How to use this slide deck

This deck was put together for those working in healthcare institutions, research and charities. The focus is on attitudes to current health and care data use in the UK.

Understanding Patient Data has been set up to support conversations with the public, patients and healthcare professionals about how health and care data is used. We hope this resource is clear and useful.

If you are aware of literature that could contribute to this deck please let us know at hello@understandingpatientdata.org.uk.



Summary

- People do not have much spontaneous understanding about the range of ways patient data is used in health.
- Most people support sharing patient data for individual care and a high proportion of people support sharing patient data for research where there is public benefit.
- Key to support is knowing who has access to patient data and how it used.
- People become more supportive of sharing patient data during the course of qualitative and deliberative studies.
- The NHS is highly trusted compared to other organisations.
- Support exists even though there are concerns.
- Certain concerns are commonly held, some concerns differ between groups.
- Using real examples, being transparent and encouraging genuine dialogue (rather than purely transmitting information) are ways in which organisations can increase their trustworthiness.



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1. Levels of awareness of how patient data is used Key messages

- There is low awareness of how patient data is used beyond individual care.
- There is a low understanding of why companies need access to patient data.
- People find it difficult to come up with "spontaneous ideas" as to how patient data might be used. ⁶
- A "gulf" exists between how people think the NHS is likely to use patient data and reality. 14



1. Levels of awareness of how patient data is used *The big picture*

- Only 33% of people have heard a great deal or fair amount about how the NHS uses health care data. ²³
- Awareness is even lower for how academic researchers (18%) and commercial organisations (16%) use health care data.²³
- Only 25% of people are aware of the NHS Genomics programme.
- Two surveys found 80 and 82% of the general public polled had not heard of the national cancer registry.¹⁹
- 1/3 of people are unaware that health and care records are not "readily shared" between health and care professionals. 13
- There is little "spontaneous understanding" of "how and why healthcare data might be used".6
- Only 20% of people feel sufficiently informed about how their data will be used, with more than half fearing that they might regret giving permission.¹²



1. Levels of awareness of how patient data is used *Commercial use of data*

- One paper reports a lack of understanding around why the NHS would want or need to allow commercial access to data, or how companies contribute to healthcare. ²³
- "Relatively few people know much about how commercial organisations use [patient] data". ²⁷
- However, one paper describes that in qualitative and deliberative research participants are often more aware than assumed of the role of commercialisation in research²



1. Levels of awareness of how patient data is used How data is used

- People underestimate what data is collected and used in healthcare, and there is "confusion about the specifics of data and data science in general. (e.g. the difference between anonymised versus identifiable data, or definition of aggregate data)". ²³
- There is low awareness and understanding of data linkage and people have few spontaneous ideas on how health data might link to other sources of data. ^{22, 24}
- There is little understanding of the status-quo around data safeguards.²³



2. Acceptability of using patient data key messages

- There is support for using patient data if it is for public benefit. This is key to the acceptability of using patient data beyond individual care.
- There is some evidence that acceptability varies between groups of people.
- Some studies show people become more supportive and accepting of the principle of sharing data during deliberative discussions exploring patient data uses.
- Acceptability and support depends on the specifics of data uses.
- Only a few examples of literature were found relating to acceptability of sharing patient data for **groups with specific health conditions** (asthma⁵, cancer⁷).



2. Acceptability of using patient data the big picture

- **Public benefit** is the **key condition** for people accepting patient data sharing. ^{20, 23, 5, 1}
- Support is high for sharing data for individual patient care (96%), but less for medical research (77%²⁵ 74%¹⁴)
 - These views vary and levels of support depend on the nature of the research and levels of trust.
- 80% of people who were asked to imagine they had a health condition that affects their day-to-day life would probably or definitely like their doctor to tell them about research which would allow researchers confidential access to their medical records.⁴



2. Acceptability of using patient data influences

- In one study 17% of people wouldn't want commercial companies accessing their health data for research at all
 - In the same study, sharing health data "for the **purposes** of **insurance** or **marketing** both face **significant resistance** from the public"
 - However, **61%** of people in the study would rather commercial companies access data than miss out on research benefits.²³
- 94% of people with asthma would share anonymised data with an analytics company to help develop tools for people at risk of an asthma attack.⁵
- When informed about the cancer registry and its uses 85% of people with cancer and 72% of the general public "believe the use of cancer data to improve services and treatments outweighs the risk to privacy and security".⁷



2. Acceptability of using patient data How views may change

- Many members over the course of a citizens' jury became more supportive of information sharing for public benefit in general, even if they were less supportive about specific potential or planned uses of data that had been open to consideration.⁸
- During the course of focus groups, as participants became more informed, many found uses of data beyond individual care more acceptable, including commercial companies using patient data.²³
- In 2016²³, **53**% of people surveyed **supported companies** accessing **health data** for health research. In 2018²⁷, **only 39**% of people were supportive when they were asked the same question for a different survey.



3. Trust in those using patient data key messages

- The NHS is highly trusted compared to other organisations.
- Generally, **GPs** and the **NHS** are trusted the most, followed by academic researchers.
- Across the literature questions about:
 - who has access,
 - for what purpose and why
 are uppermost in people's minds.
- Commercial organisations are less trusted.
- 94% said whether or not they trust the organisation asking for their data is important in considering whether or not to share data. ²⁸



3. Trust in those using patient data Who is trusted?

- Trust is highest in GP surgeries (where mentioned) and the NHS, followed by academic researchers.^{18, 1, 16, 23}
- Most institutions are trusted less with data than they are trusted overall.¹⁸
- A systematic review shows organisations being competent (data security) and having the right motivations (public benefit) are both key to gain support for data sharing.¹⁹
- A review of published literature suggests that participants generally trust "health care professionals and public sector researchers with de-identified medical data" and do not trust "government health agencies" and "commercial entities". 10
- In a European-wide survey, 24% of UK respondents would trust medical research charities with data about them. ²⁸



4. Confidence in using patient data Key messages

- Several surveys question levels of confidence around the capability of organisations to safely manage data.
- There are concerns around the capability of the NHS to keep data secure.
- There is some evidence of differences in confidence about data use across different groups of people.
- A hacking scandal can affect confidence in the ability of the NHS to handle data; but at the same time, there is relatively high trust in the ability of the NHS to protect patient data.



4. Confidence in using patient data Data security

- 85% of people in one survey knew about the Wannacry hacking scandal and 53% said their confidence in the ability of the NHS to handle data was negatively affected.¹²
- In the same survey, 77% said "they are confident in the ability of the NHS to protect their patient data." 12
- 71.3% share doubts the NHS can guarantee security of electronic health records (EHRs) whilst 53.5% would still support development of national EHR.¹⁹
- 36% are very confident and 44% fairly confident that their data would be secure in health research their doctor suggests they take part in.¹¹



5. Concerns in using patient data Key messages

- People are most concerned about certain types of sensitive patient data (such as mental and sexual health data).
- Common concerns are around security, misuse and causing harm.
- There is some evidence that some groups of people feel more powerless than others in the face of concerns.



5. Concerns in using patient data *The big picture*

- The concerns people have include data security, accountability and data falling into "the wrong hands".²¹
- Concerns around (general) personal data collection/use include:
 - that personal data inaccuracies may be hard to correct
 - the risk that the NHS may use data to discriminate by prioritising some patients for treatment over others either now or in the future.²⁴
- Perceived risks to sharing EHR data include:
 - security (hacking, leaking, loss, unauthorised access)
 - misuse (identity theft, financial gain)
 - harm (insurance costs, disadvantaging groups, re-identification, 'social discomfort and community embarrassment').
- Concerns about sharing anonymised medical records and genetic data include:
 - trust,
 - the nature of the research,
 - not knowing enough about research (especially for genetic information).



5. Concerns in using patient data The big picture

- 53% of people are more aware of data security issues than they were three years ago and 57% of people are more concerned with how their data is being used in general. 12
- Sharing sensitive data (mental health, sexual health, sexuality, religion) holds greater concern than for other types of data.3
- Young people are more aware of data security issues, yet 55% of those aged 18-34 compared to 62% of those aged 55 and older are concerned.12
- People who are concerned about privatisation often conflate it with using patient data beyond individual care. Older people tend to be more concerned about privatisation than other age groups.6



6. Demographic differences in attitudes *key messages*

- Certain concerns about patient data are commonly held, some concerns differ between groups.
- Perceptions of the benefits of sharing patient data, and confidence in sharing patient data, may differ between groups.
- Some examples show demographic differences in attitudes within studies
- Despite this, a literature review on using data from Electronic Health Records (EHR) found "no clear patterns by age, ethnicity, education level or SES emerged as to who was more favourable to data use."¹⁰



6. Demographic differences in attitudes awareness and acceptability

- Younger people are more "familiar" with 'Big Data' and could more easily think of benefits to using healthcare data.⁶
- Young people are more supportive of access to electronic patient records to improve health service administration and for research (for medicines and improved health) than for other reasons.²¹
- 36% of people are very confident and 44% fairly confident that their data would be secure in health research their doctor suggests they take part in, however:
 - Confidence is highest in the age range 15-34 and decreases with age
 - 26% of people from ethnic minority groups were very confident, compared to 37% of white people.¹¹
- People grouped by social grade as ABC1 are more likely than people grouped as C2DE to consider that health data offers potential benefits to society.²⁴



6. Demographic differences in attitudes

concerns

- People grouped by social grade as C2DE were seen to feel more powerless to deal with consequences of personal data harms than people in other socio-economic groups;²⁴
- In the same study, people were resistant to the idea of message targeting at the individual level due to data linking, and to the risk of being blamed or "told off". The study said lower socio-economic groups "can feel particularly defensive". 24
- For young people, the acceptability of Electronic Patient Records relates to:
- who has access to their record
- **having a say** in who else has access
- **privacy** from certain groups (e.g. parents)
- **being kept up to date** on the system, security and safety
- knowing who is accessing their record, why and what this might mean.²¹



Companies and patient data Key messages

- Companies have been under media and public scrutiny recently around their uses of many types of data.
- In many surveys, participants express concerns about companies using patient data.
- If there is a public benefit people are more likely to accept sharing patient data with companies.
- Few people know there are strict controls around how and why companies can access and use patient data.



Companies and patient data Summary 1

- There is a lack of understanding around why the NHS would want or need to allow commercial access to data, or how companies contribute to healthcare. ²³
- Sharing patient data for insurance or marketing "[faces] significant resistance from the public".²³
- "Relatively few people know much about how commercial organisations use [patient] data". ²⁷
- However, in qualitative and deliberative research participants are often more aware of the role of commercialisation in research.²



Companies and patient data Summary 2

- A review of literature suggests, "participants generally trusted health care professionals and public sector researchers with de-identified medical data" and did not trust "government health agencies" and "commercial entities".¹⁰
- People who are concerned about privatisation often conflate it with using patient data beyond individual care. Older people show more concern.⁶
- In 2016²³, **53**% of people surveyed **supported companies** accessing **health data** for health research. In 2018²⁷, **only 39**% of people were supportive when they were asked the same question for a different survey.



Companies and patient data Summary 3

- The conditions people would like to have in place before companies can have access to patient data include:
 - strict rules so data cannot be passed to third parties (53%)
 - removing identifying information from data before it is accessed (52%)
 - sanctions and fines if companies misuse data (47%)
 - secure storage for data (47%).
- 17% of people in the above study don't want companies accessing patient data for research under any circumstances. Their reasons focus on ideas around:
 - harm to them or to their family
 - negative impacts for society from companies accessing patient data.²³



7. Public attitudes to Electronic Health Records (EHRs) Key messages

- A systematic review found conflicting findings between studies by age range, education level and ethnicity group. It was not possible to conclude if specific groups had "an overall negative or positive attitude towards the sharing of EHRs for secondary purposes such as research".¹⁹
- In the same study 71.3% share doubts the NHS can guarantee security of EHRs whilst 53.5% would still support development of national EHR.¹⁹
- It also shows reported **public support** for **EHRs** varied between qualitative studies, with different studies reporting levels of support at **62.5%**, **62.47%** and **81%**. ¹⁹



8. Attitudes to accessing one's own patient data Key messages

- In one report, 80% of patients polled would like to view their medical records online.
 - When only 2% of the population report "any digitally enabled transactions with the NHS".
 - And only 4% of GP practices offer online health care record access to their patients, when over 96% of GP practices have installed "digital clinical record systems". 26
- 92% of adults and 97% of young people supported patient access to their own records.¹⁴



9. Communicating messages about the uses of patient data

Key messages

- Research and researchers are more likely to be "perceived as trustworthy" if transparent, open dialogue is held with the public, rather than just dissemination of information.²
- Communicating data linking "must explain the reasons for linking the data and the process of doing it very clearly" examples, visuals and diagrams are useful for understanding linkage.²²
- Research commissioned by UPD found the words used to describe patient data and its uses can be complex and confusing. Guidance on words to use which are accurate, meaningful and accessible can be found on our website. 29



Appendix

1. Administrative Data Research Centre Northern Ireland, Access Research Knowledge (ARK), *Public attitudes to data linkage and sharing* (2017)

Aim: "To capture a baseline of public attitudes in Northern Ireland towards data linkage and sharing which can then be reassessed at intervals to measure changes in public trust and understanding."

Sample/method: A survey of 1,200 people (Northern Ireland Life and Times survey - subset on data sharing), interviews

URL: https://ijpds.org/article/view/320;

http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update108.pdf;

http://www.ark.ac.uk/events/datasharingsep16.pdf

2. Aitken. M, Cunningham-Burley. S, Pagliari. C, Moving from trust to trustworthiness: Experiences of public engagement in the Scottish Health Informatics Programme (2016)

Aim: "to explore perceptions of the role, relevance and functions of trust (or trustworthiness) in relation to research practices."

Sample/method: Eight focus groups and a stakeholder workshop

URL: https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scv075



3. Aitken. M, St.Jorre. J, Pagliari. C, Jepson. R, Cunningham-Burley. S, Public responses to the sharing and linkage of health data for research purposes: a systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative studies (2016)

Aim: "[to bring together] a timely review of current evidence"

Sample/method: systematic review

URL: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-016-0153-x

4. Association of Medical Research Charities, *Public support for research in the NHS* (2011)

Aim: To investigate public support for research in the NHS.

Sample/method: 990 interviews

URL: https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/public-support-research-nhs

5. Asthma UK, Data sharing and technology: Exploring the attitudes of people with asthma (2018)

Aim: to ask people with asthma about their attitudes to sharing their patient data for research and service improvement, and about the use of new technology and data in their asthma care.

Sample/method: A survey of 3,000 people

URL: https://www.asthma.org.uk/datareport



6. British Medical Association, Secondary Uses of Healthcare Data Public Workshop Debrief (2015)

Aim: "to know more about public awareness and understanding of secondary uses of healthcare data, and what concerns the public have over the sharing of healthcare data for secondary purposes."

Sample/method: Three workshops (one public, two BMA members)

URL: https://www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/policy-and-research/ethics/secondary-uses-of-data/public-workshop

7. Cancer Research UK and Macmillan Cancer Support *Improving awareness* of the English cancer registry amongst patients, health professionals and the public (2016)

Aim: "to specifically consider how people with cancer can best be informed about cancer registration"

Sample/method: Two surveys of over 2,000 people (1,400 people with cancer, 1,000 general public, 340 health professionals) and 20 cancer charities, nine engagement events

URL: https://www.macmillan.org.uk/documents/policy/improving-awareness-of-the-english-cancer-registry.pdf



8. Connected Health Cities Connected Health Cities Citizens' Juries Report (2017)

Aim: "to understand better how the public balances [the] competing goals [of improved care and health services and protecting individual's privacy]" around planned and potential uses of data.

Sample/method: 36 people in two citizens juries

URL: https://www.connectedhealthcities.org/what-is-a-chc/public-engagment/citizens-juries-chc/citizens-juries/

9. Economic and Social Research Council and Office for National Statistics Dialogue on data: Exploring the public's views on using administrative data for research purposes (2014)

Aim: "to explore public understanding and views of administrative data and data linking"

Sample/method: 136 people including 20 experts in seven sets of workshops

URL: https://esrc.ukri.org/files/public-engagement/public-dialogues/dialogue-on-data-exploring-the-public-s-views-on-using-linked-administrative-data-for-research-purposes/

10. Ford. E, Stockdale. J, Jackson. R, Cassell. J For the greater good? Patient and public attitudes to use of medical free text data in research (2018)

Aim: "a review of the literature on patient and public understanding and attitudes towards the use of patients' medical data for research, particularly seeking views on free text".

Sample/method: Systematic search

URL: http://healtex.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Free-text-health-data-sharing-jury-report-final-2.pdf34



11. Health Research Authority and National Institute for Health Research Survey of the general public: attitudes towards health research (2017)

Aim: "to understand the range of opinions held by the public about health research"

Sample/method: Over 1,000 interviews

URL: https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/news-updates/blog-what-public-thinks-research-and-why-it-matters/

12. Healthwatch England How do people feel about their data being shared by the NHS? (2018)

Aim: "to understand more about people's attitudes towards how their data is used"

Sample/method: A survey of 2,000 people

URL: https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/how-do-people-feel-about-their-data-being-shared-nhs

13. Healthwatch Surrey (2015) If I've told you once People's views on record sharing between the health and care professionals involved in their care in Surrey

Aim: "[to investigate] the views of people in Surrey around sharing of health and care records between the health and care professionals involved in their care"

Sample/method: A survey of 577 people

URL: https://www.healthwatchsurrey.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/If-lve-told-you-once-Peoples-views-on-record-sharing-between-health-and-social-care-professionals-FULL-REPORT.pdf



14. New Economics Foundation Who Sees What: Exploring public views on personal electronic health records (2010)

Aim: "how [people] understand the Health Service's obligation to safeguard their privacy"

Sample/method: 6,000 people consulted through deliberative events, public consultation stalls, classroom activities

URL: https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/2cb17ab59382fe7c67 bfm6bdoas.pdf

15. NHS Digital NHS Digital poll on patient data and confidentiality (2018)

Aim: to poll views on sharing NHS patient address data for the investigation of crime.

Sample/method: 2,000 telephone interviews

URL: https://digital.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/nhs-digital-statement-on-health-select-committees-report-into-patient-data-sharing

16. Open Data Institute Attitudes towards data sharing (2018)

Aim: "revealing current attitudes of British adults online towards sharing personal data"

Sample/method: A survey of 2,000 people

URL: https://theodi.org/article/odi-survey-reveals-british-consumer-attitudes-to-sharing-personal-data/

17. RAND Europe *Privacy of health records Europeans' preferences on electronic health data storage and sharing* (2015)

Aim: "to quantify citizens' views on privacy and security issues in three real-life scenarios: travelling by train or metro, choosing an internet service provider and storing personal health data"

Sample/method: A survey of 26,000 EU27 citizens

URL: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9843z3.html



18. Royal Statistical Society *Public attitudes to the use and sharing of their data* (2014)

Aim: "to get a snapshot of public trust in institutions handling their data, and attitudes toward data linkage and data privacy"

Sample/method: 2,019 people polled

URL: https://www.statslife.org.uk/news/1672-new-rss-research-finds-data-trust-deficit-with-lessons-for-policymakers/
https://www.statslife.org.uk/images/pdf/rss-data-trust-data-sharing-attitudes-research-note.pdf
https://www.statslife.org.uk/files/perceptions of data privacy charts slides.pdf

19. Stockdale. J, Cassell. J and Ford. E, "Giving something back": A systematic review and ethical enquiry of public opinions on the use of patient data for research in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (2018)

Aim: "[we] aimed to systematically review the literature on UK and Irish public opinions of medical data use in research"

Sample/method: systematic review

URL: https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/3-6/v1

20. Tully. MP, Bozentko. K, Clement. S, Hunn. A, Hassan. L, Norris. R, Oswald. M, Peek. N Investigating the Extent to Which Patients Should Control Access to Patient Records for Research (2018)

Aim: "The aim of this project was to extend knowledge about what control informed citizens would seek over the use of health records for research after participating in a deliberative process using citizens' juries."

Sample/method: Two three-day citizens juries

URL: http://www.jmir.org/2018/3/e112/



21. The Royal Academy of Engineering Privacy and prejudice: Young people's views on the development and use of Electronic Patient Records (2010)

Aim: "to gather the views and disseminate the findings to the relevant stakeholders and policy makers to give young people a voice regarding the development of...the EPR system."

Sample/method: National public engagement programme 'Breathing Country' about Electronic Patient Records and their use in medical research. Electronic polling, focus groups, a two-day deliberative conference and a community researchers activity.

URL: https://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/reports/privacy-and-prejudice-views

22. UCL Public attitudes to data linkage (2018)

Aim: "to explore people's understanding and perceptions of data linkage, particularly linkage between health examination survey data and administrative records."

Sample/method: Three deliberative discussion groups

URL: http://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/public-attitudes-to-data-linkage/

23. Wellcome The One-Way Mirror: Public attitudes to commercial access to health data (2016)

Aim: "to understand how attitudes towards commercial access to health data are formed and influenced, among a cross-section of the British general public and with specific audiences such as healthcare professionals, patients, and members of cohort studies."

Sample/method: 16 workshops with 246 people, including general public, GP's and hospital doctors and people with a long term condition

URL: https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/public-attitudes-to-commercial-access-to-health-data-wellcome-mar16.pdf



24. Wellcome Summary Report of Qualitative Research into Public Attitudes to Personal Data and Linking Personal Data (2013)

Aim: "to understand the general public's attitudes to different types of personal data and data linking."

Sample/method: Six 90 minute focus groups and six 45 minute telephone interviews including 50 people from socio-economic groups ABC1 and C2DE

URL: https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/wtp053205_0.pdf

25. Wellcome Wellcome Trust Monitor Report Wave 3 Chapter 6 (2015)

Aim: "[examines public] willingness to allow their medical records, and genetic information, to be used in medical research studies, and what concerns they may have about this."

Sample/method: 1,524 interviews

URL: https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/monitor-wave3-full-wellcome-apr16.pdf

26. Nuffield Trust Delivering the benefits of digital healthcare (2016)

Aim: "set out the possibilities to transform health care offered by digital technologies"

Sample/method: Literature and evidence review, 40 interviews, survey of a panel of

NHS leaders

URL: https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/files/2017-01/delivering-the-benefits-of-digital-technology-web-final.pdf



27. The Health Foundation, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, The King's Fund and the Nuffield Trust (2018) What will new technology mean for the NHS and its patients?

Aim: "[to] question how the NHS should prepare for... technological advances"

URL: https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-

06/NHS at 70 what will new technology mean for the NHS 0.pdf

28. Open Data Institute (2018) Who do we trust with personal data?

Aim: Investigate attitudes to data sharing (Europe-wide)

Sample/method: A survey of 2,000 people

URL: https://theodi.org/article/who-do-we-trust-with-personal-data-odi-commissioned-survey-reveals-most-and-least-trusted-sectors-across-europe/

29. Understanding Patient Data (2017) Patient Data: Finding the best set of words to use

Aim: "To come up with a set of words [to describe patient data] ...which are simple, clear and accurate to help build trust and understanding"

Sample/method: Workshop, expert review, 12 focus groups with the public and health professionals

URL: http://understandingpatientdata.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/Data%20vocabulary Good%20Business%20report%20March%202017 0.pdf