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INFOPOINTS

IER—an educational resource for health informatics in general practice

The New NHS sets a premium on high quality information to support patient care.[1] This requirement has been recognised through the publication of NHS strategy documents on information.[2 3] Emerging from these policy initiatives is the need for high quality health data accessible through electronic patient record systems.[4] The quality of general practice data will underpin clinical care, practice payments, clinical governance, assessment of health needs, commissioning, and even professional reaccreditation. These policy initiatives have been accompanied by the emergence of the new discipline of health informatics in the academic curriculum and a clear need to develop training in informatics.[5]

The Informatics Educational Resource (IER) is a set of resources designed to support learning and teaching in health informatics. The material has been developed iteratively, taking feedback from several sources. Originally prepared for general practitioner registrars in Yorkshire, the IER can be used in different contexts throughout the NHS. In the past two years, IER development has been supported by a grant from the Academy of Colleges Information Group. The IER is not a course or a specification for a qualification, but a set of resources that assist different types of learning needs in different contexts. The IER defines what needs to be learnt and taught, provides material that supports this learning, and makes available other material (via links on the IER website).

The IER is one solution to the problems posed by *Learning to Manage Health Information*.[5] It covers all the subjects set out in that document and places additional emphasis on interpersonal communication and use of computers during medical consultations. We use and develop examples of audit in the IER to help trainees develop their informatics skills with "real world" problems. This is one of several pathways through the material. The IER has been modified by feedback from trainees and teachers in the Yorkshire Deanery, and we run an annual course for general practitioner educators in Yorkshire based around the IER material. The IER project and material was presented at the London conference of the Academy of Colleges Information Group ("Learning to manage health information practically") in September 2000.[6]

We believe that the IER provides a framework for teaching health informatics in a variety of settings. We stress that health informatics skills are an integral part of clinicians' everyday working practice and informatics is (at least) as much about person to person communication as it is about technical skills. We recommend that

● Efforts are made to encourage the inclusion of health informatics in all parts of medical curriculums (undergraduate and postgraduate) in all specialties

● Interpersonal skills are taught alongside information handling and information transfer

● Special attention is paid to the needs of clinicians who are currently in post

● Consideration is given to the role of clinicians in an information rich society.

The IER website (**http://128.240.23.108/eprval/**) is hosted by the Sowerby Centre for Health Informatics in Newcastle (SCHIN).

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