

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Health and Social Care Committee](#)

[Access to medical technologies in Wales](#)

Evidence from Royal College of Nursing Wales – MT 8

Nursing staff form the largest group of health care professionals, and because of their particular role in co-ordinating as well as delivering care to patients, they are major generators and users of information. High-quality patient care and nursing practice have always relied on the effective management of information. They now increasingly rely on appropriate health information technology (IT) systems (eHealth applications) for effective communication, collaboration, monitoring and decision making.

Health IT systems are now an integral part of professional nursing practice. There is evidence to suggest they make a positive difference to the safety of patients, to their experience of health care and to the working lives of health professionals.

The RCN believes that sharing information about patients across the health care service, subject to appropriate safeguards, is an integral part of nursing and multi-disciplinary care.

Personal health information systems allow patients online access to their own electronic health records and in some cases input to the record. It is acknowledged that access to good quality information helps people to understand their health situation, make informed decisions about their care and treatment, and manage their own health. Patients need to be confident that personal health information systems are secure and that vulnerable patient's records are protected from misuse by others.

The RCN therefore welcomes the introduction of appropriate health IT systems and supports the overall aims and the direction of travel of health IT in Wales. Nursing engagement and involvement at all levels are critical to success. Given the inevitability of health care IT, it is important that nursing staff, from frontline workers

to leaders, embrace the agenda and play a key role in it, meeting the needs of the profession, patients and health care.

The RCN consider that ehealth brings the following benefits:

- patient safety – patients’ demographic and clinical information is more legible, accessible and shareable, thereby giving clinicians more accurate, timely and complete data on which to base decisions
- effectiveness – clinical pathways and decision support systems can be embedded in electronic patient systems to give easy access to best practice evidence
- efficiency – more efficient work processes due to increased availability of clinical information, for example electronic transmission of prescriptions direct to the pharmacy
- patient centred – information about patient’s preferences more easily available
- timeliness – access to up-to-date information on which to base clinical decisions
- equitable – ensuring that all people have the same level of access to services.

In the current economic climate, it is important that all public spending is closely monitored and the RCN therefore welcomes this Inquiry by the Health and Social Care Committee. In Wales the RCN has been an active member of the Community Care Information Solution Procurement processes as well as the Informatics Board. The Community Care Information solution is a joint system which Social Care and Health can use. Whilst we are aware of the complexity of the task at hand we have been concerned with the length of time the procurement process has taken and our members are concerned about how the new system will fit with existing systems. Given that Public Services in Wales are likely to see structural changes or at the very least formal partnership working arrangements in the near future we are concerned that Local authorities and Local Health Boards are able to chose whether to link into

system or not. Despite this, the RCN remains committed to helping to deliver the health IT systems that frontline nursing staff want and need, and patients expect and deserve.

ABOUT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING (RCN)

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 400,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 23,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.