

EASY SHARING OF CLINICAL DOCUMENTS

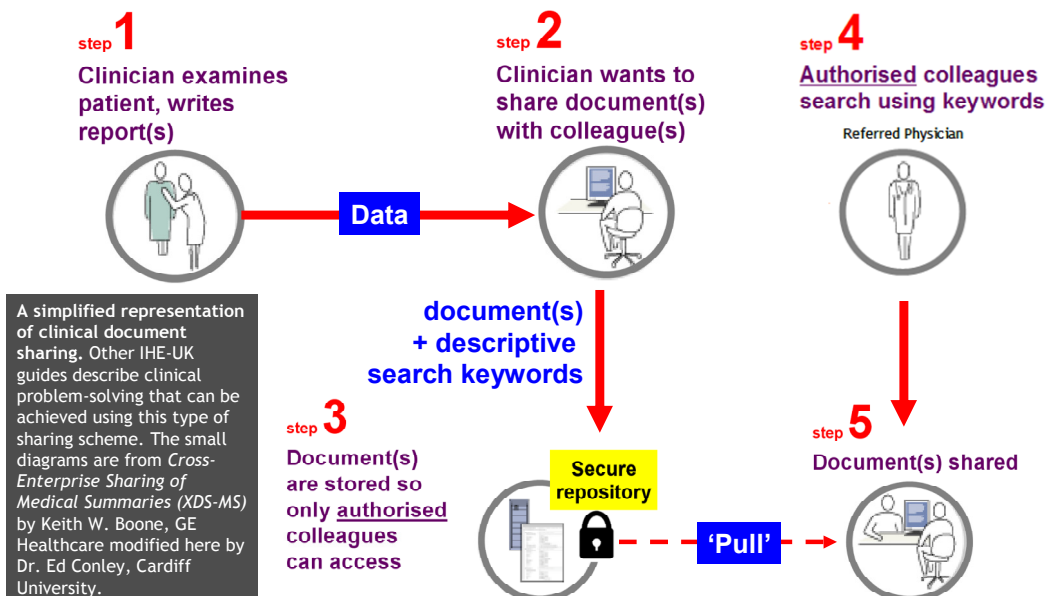
IHE-UK IT Infrastructure Group. Compiled by Nicholas Brown—for further information see links below.

A SIMPLE SCHEME FOR CLINICAL INFORMATION SHARING

A recently introduced scheme allows healthcare professionals who care for the same group of patients in a geographic area to easily share clinical documents in electronic form. It can be used within a community setting of several organisations or within a single organisation.

When a clinician wishes to share a document, it is securely stored in a local or centralised location in such a way that authorised colleagues can access it. The computer system which stores the copy sends descriptive information along with the document so that colleagues can search for it in various ways (see figure). Basic descriptive information such as patient name, date and organisation name act as reliable search keywords and can be automatically recorded by the computer system.

When the patient is seen by a colleague he or she can use their system to search for relevant documents. For example, those that have been created during a relevant date range. More refined searches are possible by the use of other items in the descriptive data, such as the document type, report or discharge summary, for example. Locally stored documents can be quickly retrieved. The document sharing scheme has now



been implemented in a number of countries and products that support it are available from a large number of different suppliers. The scheme can be used to share existing documents as well as newly created ones.

Every computer system within the area where sharing is possible has access to a centralised document registry which contains only the descriptions of documents submitted for sharing, not their actual contents, which

may be sensitive. Documents held in stores within an organisation that have not been offered for sharing cannot be 'seen' in searches.

The specification of this scheme has been created by an international not-for-profit organisation called Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise (IHE) which enables healthcare IT system users and healthcare system suppliers to work together to produce healthcare IT systems that work smoothly together.

Products that follow IHE specifications allow existing systems that create documents to submit them for sharing and to search and retrieve documents. **It is now easy to set up a document sharing scheme and start to immediately gain the benefits of better communication between clinicians.** Support for the control of access rights by different local clinicians is controlled by the scheme on the basis of expressed patient preference.

To help all types of stakeholders learn more about IHE and its applications in solving a wide range of real-world problems, the IHE-UK IT Infrastructure Group has produced a number of 'user-friendly' guides for three different types of reader:

For UK Strategists — a simple, one-page executive summary of the benefits for clinicians of IHE document sharing ([this guide](#)).

For UK Clinical Leaders/Commissioners — more detailed but pragmatic problem-solving guides to the *background* of IHE initiatives like XDS, XDS-I and XDS-MS—and the reasons why they are being rapidly adopted around the world.

For UK Technical Implementers — a more structured set of guides for implementing a range of problem-solving technical solutions, with recommended step-by-step implementation paths *via* selective links to IHE documentation. *Currently in planning, first outputs mid-2008.*