
How Do You Keep the Hippocratic Oath in a Modern World of Information Exchange?



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The Hippocratic Oath, one of the most famous texts in medicine, and perhaps one of the most famous oaths in any profession, is seen as a rite of passage when qualifying as a physician. It represents a commitment to, and the upholding of, ethical standards in medicine. As a qualified GP I remember the sense of pride in taking the oath, and my firm belief in what it stands for.

Written over 2,500 years ago, the Hippocratic Oath lays out ethical standards in medicine that are still upheld today. Importantly, the oath sets out a key component of healthcare provision - privacy of patient information. While the original text may have slightly changed over time, the spirit is the same: 'I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know.' This commitment to confidentiality is one of the key reasons there is strong trust held between healthcare professionals and patients. However, in the modern world of smartphones and messaging services that allowing quick and easy communication, is our obligation to upholding patient confidentiality truly being met?

I know first-hand how important it is to be able to share patient information, expert knowledge and advice across the multi-disciplinary teams involved in a patient's care. In our private lives, technology has allowed for instant information exchange, to the point where it is now the norm. However, within the NHS, the reality is that the messaging systems in place have not kept pace, leading to many healthcare professionals using their private devices to overcome this barrier to the quick, easy exchange of information between colleagues.

This practice is underlined by results from a recent survey by the BMJ which suggested that almost two thirds of doctors (65%) had used SMS to share patient information with colleagues; that 46% had sent pictures involving a patient wound or x-ray, and that 33% had used app-based messaging services. Furthermore, one in four believed this confidential clinical information was still held on their smartphone. While the need and desire for healthcare professionals of all disciplines to be able to share knowledge and communicate at work via their own personal devices is clear, by doing so they are inadvertently breaking the oath we all took when first embarking on our careers as healthcare professionals.

While technology has provided the means to allow increasingly sophisticated ways to instantly exchange information it has also put pressure on the legal framework within healthcare. However, technology can also provide the answer. There is the opportunity to improve healthcare delivery through utilising new compliant technologies to increase the spread of knowledge and reduce the cost of delivery, to potentially increase the speed with which healthcare becomes a predominantly preventative science.

It was first-hand experience of this dilemma that drove me to try and do something about it. This is no small task, but building secure connections for knowledge-sharing and partnerships in health is vitally important.

At [Medic Creations](#), we believe we can re-imagine healthcare through shared experience and knowledge to transform care. We also firmly believe that by connecting the large knowledge base available within the NHS, across the multi-disciplinary team, in an instant but secure way, the NHS can save money, care, time, develop collective skills, and provide real value.

To answer the need for a secure, instant messaging service, we created [Medic Bleep](#), a state-of-the-art, regulatory-compliant data exchange platform, that's demonstrated compliance in accordance with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) clause 27001 for information security management systems (ISMS) and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). Medic Bleep facilitates secure, private clinical discussions on patient cases across the multi-disciplinary team, addressing the shortcomings associated with specialists working in silos. Medic Bleep allows a healthcare professional to immediately share text, images, and sound recordings anywhere in the hospital, anywhere in the community or anywhere in the country. This improvement in communication efficiency has, in my opinion and experience, the potential to save an estimated 3.5 hours per day for a doctor. There is also the potential to achieve higher patient satisfaction as increased communication across the multi-disciplinary team could reduce patient waiting times. Most importantly, the Hippocratic Oath is still kept, and trust between doctor and patient is maintained.

While being able to instantly and securely share patient information is key, having the ability to tap in to the vast collective knowledge of colleagues at any time, on any topic, is also an unutilised opportunity. That's why we've also developed [The On Call Room](#) (The OCR), an app that allows knowledge sharing to help improve health outcomes, connecting and empowering multi-disciplinary communities to evolve education and learning. Again, The OCR is HIPAA and ISO/IEC 27001 compliant. Both apps are available as a free download via the App Store and Google Play(tm) Store.

Addressing the issues of secure, instant, and free information exchange is a critical step to ensuring the beneficial exchange of information and knowledge among healthcare professionals, but the next step is to make sure the technology is used. Once clinicians are using IM services that

are compliant with the codes, the opportunity for cross-site/specialism multi-disciplinary teams working in an inter-connected and collaborative way expands massively, offering huge benefits to healthcare professionals and patients alike.

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