

# NHS patient information leaflets are 'inaccurate, inconsistent and confusing'

July 30 2013

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The NHS's patient information leaflets are "inaccurate, inconsistent, and confusing – and effort is duplicated" argues GP Margaret McCartney in *BMJ*.

In a feature published today, Dr McCartney says the NHS is "awash" with [patient information](#) and with many trusts commissioning [leaflets](#) from external companies and others writing their own, it is difficult to know how efficient and effective these leaflets are.

In a personal view, Dr McCartney says the NHS is "awash" with patient information and with many trusts commissioning leaflets from external companies and others writing their own, it is difficult to know how efficient and effective these leaflets are.

Previous studies have shown that leaflets are providing patients with inconsistent guidance and others are giving conflicting advice. As such, patients are being given very different information depending on where they live.

A study carried out on one set of leaflets for the removal of kidney stones found they did not consistently mention common complications and had a wide variation of information on drugs and pain-killers. Furthermore, complications were often inadequately explained.

Sir Muir Gray, co-chair of the executive council of the Information Standard (a scheme for organisations producing evidence based

[healthcare information](#) for the public), said "It's a stupid system, a waste of money, and, without rigorous standards [...] the information is biased and misleading".

McCartney says that the problem of varying leaflets is not new: a *BMJ* investigation in 1998 found [inaccuracies](#) and outdated information in leaflets given out by [general practitioners](#).

One researcher at the University of Oxford says the problem is that "the NHS still fails to take this seriously", adding that, at the moment, in most NHS trusts there is no one who has responsibility. This means that leaflets can end up amateurish "with the evidence and uncertainties not expressed clearly".

One spokesman told the *BMJ* that NHS England is, however, launching a "major project" in September which they hope will "standardise all information".

McCartney concludes that the challenge now is "to adopt high standards [...] updating information regularly and making it easily accessible". She adds that "this is one area of the NHS where efficiency savings look ripe for the picking".

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: NHS patient information leaflets are 'inaccurate, inconsistent and confusing' (2013, July 30) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-nhs-patient-leaflets-inaccurate-inconsistent.html>

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