

# Patients urged not to opt out of health database

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IT would be "enormously damaging" if patients decided to opt out of the new NHS database scheme, medical charities have warned.

The database, which pools the medical notes of every NHS patient by collecting them from GP records from surgeries across England, is "like a jigsaw" and would be incomplete if people choose to opt out, organisations have warned.

Every home in Britain will soon receive a letter advising them that, from April, their medical histories will be shared with researchers and pharmaceutical companies unless they opt out.

Charities including Cancer Research UK say the database will help them understand the causes of disease, spot side-effects to new drugs and detect outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Doctors have promised that patients will remain anonymous. However, health professionals have admitted the "care. data" database could be vulnerable to targets from hackers, but say it is necessary to improve the health service.

Prof Peter Weissberg, of the British Heart Foundation, said: "The benefits are enormous and the risks are small."

Phil Booth, of medconfidential, the campaign group, said: "It's everyone's right to keep their family's medical records confidential, but the only way you can do that now is to opt out."

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