

The impact of COVID-19 on electronic repeat dispensing (eRD) in general practice

Raman Sharma¹, Zaheer Babar², and Farideh Javid³

¹Parkside Medical Practice

²University of Huddersfield School of Applied Sciences

³University of Huddersfield

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Abstract

Electronic repeat dispensing (eRD) has been part of the community pharmacy contract since 2005 and a requirement in the General Medical Services contract since 2019. eRD allows the prescribing of medicines for stable long-term conditions for a defined period without authorisation, consultation, by prescribing healthcare professionals each time. NHS England highlights benefits of eRD as increased efficiency in general practice of 2.7 million hours annually if 80% of all repeat prescriptions are issued as eRD. Despite clear benefits to patients, community pharmacies and general practices, the uptake of eRD remains low and variable across general practices in West Yorkshire. The current COVID-19 pandemic has placed huge strains on repeat prescribing systems in general practice. The aim of the project was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on eRD in general practice and understand the key enablers to its uptake. In conclusion, two main enabling factors identified within this study that may lead to improved implementation and uptake of eRD. These are integrating eRD into normal routine workflows where prescribing authorisation is concerned and nominating an internal eRD champion. Utilising eRD in the respective practices should be considered due to potential efficiency gains and the increase in average eRD utilisation observed in the study participating general practices across West Yorkshire was from 7.2% average uptake in March 2020 to 10.4% November 2020. The stated benefits of eRD by NHS England of 2.7 million hours per annum predates the roll of electronic transmission of prescriptions suggesting further research is needed.

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