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Dear Colleagues

An article was published by the Guardian newspaper on 1 November 2006 that encouraged readers to write to their General Practitioners asking them to ensure that their records were not put onto the NHS Care Records Service. I understand that copies of these letters and an associated cut-out coupon are beginning to be received in GP Practices. If you do receive any such letters I would ask you to send them to the Department of Health at the following address so that they may receive full consideration –

The Secretary of State
Department of Health
79 Whitehall
Richmond House
London SW1A 2NS

Please note that there are currently no clinical records being put into a national database. There are a number of sites that will be piloting the Summary Record for the NHS Care Records service in 2007 to evaluate the process of shared electronic records. The initial upload of the Summary Record will contain only basic information, ie medication and allergies. We are not at the stage of a national roll out at this time. There will be plenty of time to discuss patients' concerns with them before any data uploads take place in their area. They will be able to ensure their concerns are addressed and are able to discuss how they might effectively limit their participation if they wish.

The standard letters provided in the Guardian article contain a number of misleading statements, for example that the Police and other agencies can gain access and that the Department of Health threatens to withhold appropriate medical care to objectors. The Department of Health is responding in detail to individual patients who have written to the Secretary of State. In the meantime, you may wish to download material from the NHS Connecting for Health website for your own information. We have also made available a *proforma* letter which you could send to those patients who have written to you asking for their records to be withheld from the NHS Care Records Service.

The website is www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/guardiancouponletter and it also holds links to other useful information about the National Programme for IT in the NHS.

Yours sincerely



**SIR LIAM DONALDSON
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**