

# TheBigOptOut.org

For immediate release – 18/12/06

## **Ministers can't stop you opting out, says TheBigOptOut.org**

Today Lord Warner (the health minister who is responsible for the NHS IT disaster and who is resigning at the end of the month) will publish recommendations that patients wanting to opt out from the NHS central database will have to show 'substantial distress'. That is a U-turn on assurances given previously by other health ministers and by the NHS 'patient tsar'. However, GP records are not the property of the Secretary of State; the GP is the data controller. Patients can and should ask their GP not to upload their records if they are worried about safety or privacy – using the opt-out letter on the TheBigOptOut.org's website.

Says Helen Wilkinson, National Coordinator of TheBigOptOut.org, 'People should opt out now, if only to wait and see if the government delivers the 'protections' that it is promising and whether they are credible. If you use TheBigOptOut.org's opt out letter, you can always change your mind and opt back in later.'

Says Ross Anderson, Professor of Security Engineering at Cambridge: 'So long as your GP hasn't uploaded all your records to a hosting centre already, you are free and clear. You can instruct him or her not to using TheBigOptOut.org's letter and then you have medical ethics, UK laws of confidence and data protection, and EU law on human rights – as well as the majority of GPs themselves – all on your side.'

Phil Booth, National Coordinator of NO2ID, says: 'Government spin doctors are in a panic and working overtime. TheBigOptOut.org has evidence that the official promise of an 'opt out' is just a smokescreen. Lord Warner must answer unambiguously how many civil servants, police and others will have access to our medical records under his centralised data-sharing regime.'

-ENDS-

## **Notes for editors**

1. In November 2006, a Medix poll showed that 52% of GPs did not plan to upload their patients' data without prior consent – just 13% said they would upload without any consent at all. A Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust survey released in the same month showed that 53% of patients oppose 'Requiring everyone's medical records to be stored in a centralised database for access by civil servants and government officials, with no right to opt out'. Just 27% of the public were in favour.

2. TheBigOptOut.org launched a campaign on the 29<sup>th</sup> November to get patients to opt out of having their medical information uploaded to the NHS 'Spine'. Thousands of patients have already downloaded our opt-out letter.

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