National Audit of Cardiac Rehabilitation: Patient consent and confidentiality

The NHS is committed to ensuring that all patients receive the highest quality care and achieve similar benefits no matter where they live in the UK. The NACR, which is funded by the British Heart Foundation, is the only national audit collecting data on the quality of care and clinical outcomes for patients taking part in cardiac rehabilitation (CR) following a heart attack or after bypass surgery or having a stent inserted into diseased arteries in the heart. The NACR is a quality improvement process aiming to reduce known inequalities in how patients access services and also to improve patient care and outcomes. This is achieved by comparing the data collected by the NACR, from all programmes in the UK, with agreed national ‘minimum standards’ on how best to deliver CR.

To fulfil this role the NACR needs to collect data from routine clinical practice about the type of service offered and the typical benefits patients achieve. To get the best possible picture, that fully represents the population of the UK, we ideally need data from all patients. The data the NACR collects serves three purposes:

- To support local hospital or community based rehab teams to generate their own local reports about patient progress.
- To enable the national audit team to monitor and improve the quality of CR services across the UK.
- To use audit data to help answer key research questions about how well CR is carried out and to use these findings to influence future clinical practice.

The data seen by the national audit team does not contain a patient’s personal details, in fact the NACR collects much less data than local CR teams. Instead the national level data we collect tells us about your age, gender and the type of heart event you had. We also collect data on how soon you were seen, how long your rehab was and how much it helped.

The BHF and the national audit team have data sharing agreement with NHS Digital, the organisation that holds NHS data. The data sharing agreement ensures that our procedures, for using only the agreed data about your rehab experience, are of the highest quality. The agreement is reviewed annually by NHS Digital’s Confidentiality Advisory Group (CAG).

The challenge of gaining patient consent, to use their data for national audit purposes, is extremely difficult and creates a huge burden on services and staff during the management of a heart attack or immediately following surgery. For this reason the NHS has in place an ‘exemption from consent’ process where clinical and personal data is entered into NHS systems. Requests, from national audits, to use part of this data require annual confidentiality committee approval from NHS Digital.

The NACR is doing its best to protect patient data and ensure that appropriate and proportional approval processes are in place to ensure that patient data and confidentiality is protected. Nevertheless if, as a patient, there is a desire to not share your CR specific data with the national audit, you can ask your clinical team not to include your data in the national report.

Prof Patrick Doherty
Director of NACR

For more information about the national audit and to see the types of data we report please see our web page:

www.cardiacrehabilitation.org.uk