

## Version 8 of the Information Governance Toolkit - What it's all About!

The Department of Health body, 'Connecting for Health' has produced a toolkit which allows NHS organisations, dentists, opticians, private healthcare providers and other relevant suppliers to healthcare to assess themselves against a series of policies and standards relating to Information Governance. The toolkit is available online, and healthcare bodies upload their scores and evidence against each of the standards via the online tool.

The Information Governance toolkit is not a new invention by the Department of Health - it has been around for several years. The difference with version 8 of the toolkit when compared to previous version however, is that it has been made more accessible to organisations that are not PCTs (Primary Care Trusts) or Acute Trusts. Historically the Information Governance Toolkit was aimed towards these large NHS provider organisations, providing a tool for them to use to help support the internal management of their Information Governance agenda. Because the results of the tool were submitted to the Connecting for Health team, there was an audit process in place which allowed for external scrutiny of the performance that these NHS bodies were declaring via the toolkit. This external scrutiny provided additional reassurance to the public and to the organisation that Information Governance standards were being adhered to.

It soon became apparent that a similar process needed to be applied to other healthcare providers, and specifically any independent healthcare provider (such as BUPA), and any provider who had access to patient level data (companies who processed data or provided patient level software to the NHS, etc). The system was thus expanded to ensure that these individuals could apply for a log in to the toolkit, and submit their assessment and evidence accordingly.

By the time version 8 was released, dentists, pharmacists and opticians suddenly found themselves required to demonstrate compliance with the Department of Health Information Governance standards too. Use of the toolkit was seen as the perfect way to enable these primary care providers to demonstrate their compliance. And so version 8 of the toolkit now has the capacity to allow self assessment of Information Governance compliance for Acute NHS providers, PCTs, independent healthcare providers, independent suppliers of services to healthcare providers, opticians, dentists and pharmacists - clever!

Version 8 of the toolkit is also more streamlined and easier to follow. The log in process is simple - you enter your organisational code, your user name and your password and you are automatically taken to a homepage that is customised to display the Information Governance standards that are relevant for your organisational type. If you don't have any log in details, you simply complete a form stating your reasons for request and submit it immediately to Connecting for Health.

Each of the standards relevant to your specific organisational type is accessible from your home page, and a definition of each of the pieces of evidence that you must have in place is provided for each standard. Version 8 of the toolkit is clever in so far as it doesn't allow you to state that you are at a particular level for a specific standard unless you have physically 'ticked' to say that you have evidence in place for all of the lower levels against that standard.

The process by which Connecting for Health approves your assessment also appears to have sped up a lot since previous toolkit versions.

We know now that version 9 of the toolkit will be released in September 2011. It will build on the successes of version 8, but is likely to tie in more closely with the Care Quality Commission standards. Within the current healthcare climate, this makes perfect sense.

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