

## Shared Care

There was a time when if you wanted to communicate in writing with someone a long distance away, the most common practice was to put pen to paper and write them a letter.

‘Snail mail’ as it is now known is not nearly as widely used these days, and you can usually expect whatever does still end up in your letterbox, to be junk mail or bills rather than correspondence from those near and dear to you.

Email has taken over, and post offices are hard pressed to compete. The world is moving on; what we are steadily moving towards is a digital future.

There will also come a time, not terribly far away, when we will look back at how our medical information was once stored and perhaps wonder how our health system coped before it shifted to a computerised system.

Today our doctors and health professionals commonly have rooms full of filing cabinets holding whole forests worth of paper, containing information about the physical and mental health of the patients they treat. Information must be found by hand, and it can be a difficult task to share information between practices.



The Ministry of Health has set a goal that by 2014, the way our healthcare records are handled will be similarly revolutionised by modern technology.

This important information will be stored mainly on computers instead of in filing cabinets, offering a centralised source of information that can be readily accessed by medical staff treating you anywhere in the country.

One benefit this could offer you as a patient is the need for fewer tests due to the fact that your psychiatrist, for example, will have access to the results of any tests ordered by your GP.

Another advantage this system offers psychiatrists and other health professionals, is that they will easily be able to see what medications you have been prescribed. Having this knowledge could help prevent situations where you may be prescribed medications by different individuals that shouldn't be taken together.

Accurate, accessible medical records will also mean that it will be easier to change from one doctor or GP to another in future. Initial consultations with new patients to establish their medical history will be made shorter, and need to be less in-depth, because the majority of this information will already be at their fingertips.

Keeping your information private will be important of course, but in spite of—and in some ways because of—the recent failures of WINZ and the IRD to keep client information safe that have

been reported by the media, the systems put in place to guarantee the security of this sensitive information will be some of the most robust available.



Exactly how much of your information is already stored digitally, will depend on how your doctor or GP currently keeps these records. In some cases, pages of written information may be scanned, to convert them into files that will be accessible via computer.

Undoubtedly the most important individual who will have access to your medical records will be yourself. It can be expected that the process of logging into your records will be similar to using internet banking. Digitally storing your information in a single location will mean that it will be easier than ever for you to check your records for accuracy and completeness.

Computerised storage of medical records has already been implemented in other countries including America, and has proven to be highly effective. It is likely that with the constant improvements that are being made in computer technology, that New Zealand's own experience of this system will be even better come 2014.

For more information, go to:  
[www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz)  
and search for “Shared Care”

Tony Spencer

“Korero Mai” is edited by Gordon Hudson, “What’s On” by Stephanie Mapley and “Whakaaro Pai” by Tony Spencer—all from Like Minds Taranaki. Your news and views are eagerly sought. Like Minds Taranaki, PO Box 5015, New Plymouth, 3rd Floor, Brougham House, Devon Street West, NP, ph 06-759-0966 [mental.health@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mental.health@xtra.co.nz). [www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz](http://www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz)  
The January 2013 issue will be distributed in mid December 2012. Contributions by Monday 10th December 2012 please.