

RCGP Research and Surveillance Centre

Information for patients

The RSC works closely with the [RCGP patients group](#). Patients are encouraged to join this group and feedback to the centre.

What is the RSC National Monitoring Network?

The National Monitoring Network is a network of GP surgeries across England that contributes medical information to an electronic database. The information collected by the network is used for the surveillance of a range of common infections and diseases that doctors regularly diagnose. The current focus is on spotting changes in infections and other diseases. It also researches vaccine benefits. It is involved in other research, including diabetes, though any research will be ethically approved by the relevant research ethics committee. The network is mainly funded by [Public Health England](#).

Why is this network important?

The network is monitoring infections and diseases in the community. Surveillance is also important for responding to specific incidents that might affect the health of the public. For example, the RSC can monitor influenza rates during the winter. If these exceed normal levels, we inform doctors and hospitals to warn them that they might expect an increase in patients using services. A high level of influenza can also trigger the release of special additional measures, such as the release of anti-flu medications. During the pandemic of 2009, the RSC provided samples to observe the spread of the virus in the community and monitor if the anti-viral drugs prescribed were effective.

How is information from each consultation used?

After a consultation, the doctor enters the information using relevant codes in the patient's computerised medical record system. This information includes the GP's diagnosis of what might be causing the patient's symptoms or illnesses. The RSC performs a search on the surgery computer system data for information about all new diagnoses that have been made. These diagnoses include information about diseases, and information about other activities in the surgery such as vaccination details, so that the RSC can study effectiveness. The data are anonymised prior to being used for research. As the identifying information (such as names, addresses and date of birth) are removed from the record, patients cannot be identified from these extracted records.

How does this affect patients?

All information is collected anonymously and should not affect patient care in any way. The information is extremely important for protecting the whole population. The RSC has taken all measures necessary to ensure that patient confidentiality is maintained. There is a mechanism by which a patient can decide not to allow their information to be used: please inform your GP and your information will not be included in the anonymised database.