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The NHS and Data Protection

Thank you for contacting me about data protection in the NHS.

I understand you are concerned about recent revelations from the United States about plans for Facebook to collect patient data from hospitals and match them with its user information. I am sure you are relieved to know that this scheme has been put on hold while Facebook deals with its privacy troubles. This research project was intended to use data to improve patient care. According to all parties involved, no medical records had been shared before this project was halted.

I hope I can assure you that the NHS has no plans to begin sharing patients' data with social networks like Facebook. As you may be aware, this year sees the implementation of new European rules on data protection, which will be enshrined in UK Law by a forthcoming Data Protection Act. While new guidance is still being developed by NHS Digital, I have been assured that these guidelines will comply with the new regulations, to protect all individuals' privacy and personal information.

The NHS has a duty to safeguard patient data, and this remains a high priority. The new data protection rules create new rights for individuals to protect their data, and I hope you are encouraged to know that the NHS is making sure that these rights will be properly implemented. In the meantime, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care wants to modernise the way the NHS uses and shares patient data, to improve the quality of care. This will enable intelligent data sharing between GPs, hospitals, medical researchers and social care organisations, which I hope will improve the quality of patient care, and research into new and innovative treatments

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP