Computers and the internet play an increasing role in hsc. why

Computers and the internet play an increasing role in health and social care. In what ways can they help make care safer and better What problems can their use createToday??™s society relies heavily on computer and internet use. Most major businesses and organisations such as hospitals, the government, the police force and airports use computers and the internet to assure an efficient, smooth running system.

Within the role of health and social care the majority of care providers use computers and the internet. Although the use of computers and the internet are widespread and generally make care safer and better, their usage it is not without problems. This essay will explore some of the ways computers and the internet make care better and safer and the problems their use can create. Most care providers such as hospitals and GP surgeries use computers to store patient information and these are often linked by internet to other surgeries, laboratories and specialist units.

This facilitates increased efficiency and quicker referrals as well as sharing patient information with other care professionals. (Pyper et al, DATE (reader chapter 22) With unexpected hospital admissions, the hospital can access patient quickly as well as the full medical history. Prior to the computer ??? boom??™, hospitals relied on phone conversations, faxes or couriers, with the potential for important information to be missed, lost or forgotten. The NHS Norfolk is now creating ??? Summary Care Records??? which are electronic records to give health care staff faster and easier access to essential information to provide safe treatment in case of emergencies. (NHS Leaflet) This is an example of how computers are used to help make care safer.

Technology allows information to be more complete and facilitates easy long term storage for a patient??™s lifespan. However, computers cannot prioritise. A system relies on a person to think for it and to constantly update and prioritise records. Computers and the internet cannot say where one person??™s illness and needs are greater than another, although programming can enable problems to be identified and combine symptoms to suggest an illness. However, it is essential these results are double checked by a medical professional. As technology develops, computers in particular have made care safer and more sophisticated. Finding information, sharing notes and information is quicker as it can be e-mailed straight to the relevant departments.

Care providers can share information so care can be provided by more than one person. Different agencies can provide information on patients and staff members. Nurses, Gps and consultants have better access to patient records, staff notes and appointment information. At one touch a care worker can be reminded of past procedures and agreements about future arrangements. (REF)Patients are able to access their own histories and information kept on them and when family members or carers have permission they can request information on a person to help care for said person. An example of how data protection laws can become complicated is shown with Dan and his mother (K101, Block 5, pp 80). Dans mother wants to discuss her sons drug habit discretely.

The doctor may discuss the situation without giving away any personal information however the doctor would log her visit on Dan??™s medical record and on hers. Dan now wants to see his medical history and due to the

risk factor to his mother the doctor may feel they need to omit this visit from his record as it could put her at risk. The question whether computers and the internet make health care safer in this situation is questionable. In the past the doctor may have chatted with Dan??™s mother and not documented it, in this case it is recorded and all Dan may need to do is look at the computer screen to see his mothers visit. Data protection laws are very strict and as can be seen from several newspaper articles revealing stories about falsified information, or mistakes in medical records it is a tricky area. Recently in the news Norwich University was found to be leaving student information in skips rather than destroying personal information, information included pictures, personal information and sensitive medical information. (Evening news 24) The university is currently under investigation for breaching these strict confidentiality laws. Although computers and the internet are hugely beneficial to most businesses or organisations they are not without problem or fault.

Computers are machines and do break down occasionally. For a person at home with one computer connected to the internet this is one thing but for a huge system such as a hospital the consequences can be devastating. If a system breaks down patients??™ notes may be temporarily lost for five minutes or five hours. Although most large organisations have protocols in place for such an occurrence a situation like this will still affect the efficiency of a hospital, causing added stress for staff members as well as the patients. Computers connected to the internet are vulnerable to computer viruses or hackers. Computer viruses and hackers can break through internet security systems and may destroy a system or remain seemingly harmless whilst

transmitting information or passwords. It is essential to maintain up-to-date computer data security systems, to ensure this does not occur. The impact could be very serious for an organisation or individual patients.

A hacker could resort to other illegal means such as fraud, and identity theft. Before the use of technology, if a staff member lost one paper file on a patient it would not have the same consequences as now, when one small disk can contain hundreds or thousands of files. This is down to human error and although accidents do happen this must be dealt with quickly and efficiently limiting damage. Data protection and confidentiality are an important legality. Patients rely on the information they provide to be kept private and care providers cannot share this information without consent unless within particular guidelines. Where care providers store patient information online data protection needs to be a priority.

Breaches in security, whether computerised or by a person can result in information being shared about a patient??™s medical history, and personal details which can make it easier for criminals to pray on the vulnerable whether it is through fraud, or burglary. Care workers often find they have too much paperwork, as can be seen with Christine she and her ??? patients??™ find that form filling is distracting and inpersonal. It is though that at least forty percent of a care workers time is spent filling out forms and copying notes. (K101, Block 5, p70) Often patients become frustrated with form filling, as can be seen with health visitor Christine (K101 DVD, Video 18. 3) ??? patients??™ feel the care worker is more focused on filling out the form than listening to them.

Staff members also feel that form filling is impersonal and can be a barrier to working with colleagues as well as between themselves and patients. Form filling is necessary for smooth running of any care environment however as can be seen from Christine??™s visit to new parents Amy and Zac particular questions are not asked. It is only on reflection following her visit and observing the interview made that questions of domestic violence arise. Should Christine have just filled out the form and gone on her way she may never have realised there was a domestic violence issue.

With a new baby in the house, and a vulnerable mother this could be devastating. Following the interview the question arises whether Christine should report this case as the mother has pleaded for her not to but for safety??™s sake for Amy and Zac she has a duty to protect them. On relflection Christine discusses her feelings about form filling and feels they do not allow any ??? scope for instinctive feelings??? (K101 DVD, video 18. 2) Filling in forms is necessary to keep up to date notes but surely it is just as important to make sure that the form covers all relevant aspects and details. Some health care professionals have data clerks and in this case it is more important to make sure all the information is present.

Data clerks simply copy the information they are presented, they have no memories of the case and should relevant information be omitted they will not be in a position to question it. This is just one example of the negative effects form filling can have. A nurse may leave out important information on a generalised form that she may have added on her own notes. As we see from Christine??™s visit she completes one form which she returns to the parents, however the other form she does not complete and if she relies on

memory at the end of a busy day she could confuse patients, omit important information and add wrong information. A member of personnel responsible for typing up notes may mistakenly type information into the wrong patient??™s notes, copy figures wrong, misread spellings and so on.

If a surname was written incorrectly for example a care provider would struggle to find the particular patient and would either have to fill in another form or search through medical histories to find the correct patient. Alternatively a baby??™s weight can be typed differently from a midwife??™s notes. The notes that are then printed and given to a mother, this can cause a query if a baby suddenly appears to lose a large amount of weight. Patient information is often not computerised immediately and forms can be misplaced or damaged and important information that is not written down immediately can be forgotten. When forms are copied manually it can be copied incorrectly and this can result in confusion, misdiagnosis etc. As discussed above the use of computers can massively help and support health and social care providing the correct training and procedures are followed and constantly reviewed and updated to minimise risk. It is important to remember that computer records can only form a partial account of a persons history, they cannot assess peoples emotions and do not have ??? gut instinct??™ and therefore cannot and should not be used to replace a human being.