

Preamble*

Patients' rights

WHY HAVE PATIENTS' RIGHTS BECOME IMPORTANT?

For centuries, patients have been relatively content to relegate the management of their healthcare to professionals—until recently. The growing number of older people in the population, coupled with a gradual rise in the incidence of chronic disease, have elevated both costs and demand to the point at which policymakers are having to ration healthcare services. Fiscal austerity measures within the healthcare system are altering the very nature of healthcare provision.

Patients are becoming unsettled about the implications of change. Patient surveys in individual countries, and worldwide, have revealed a high degree of dissatisfaction with even routine elements of healthcare. Specific concerns are the explosion in reported cases of adverse drug reactions and hospital-acquired infections (HAIs); accounts of medical negligence; and—worse still—rumours of cover-ups.

The public, patients, their families and carers are all concerned by the increasingly numerous threats to the supply of their medical care and treatment. Now that governments are striving to devolve onto individual patients more responsibility for the management of their personal wellbeing, patients and the public are pressing for greater access to medical information, for added protection from possible medical blunders, and, above all, for authority in the shaping and delivery of their own healthcare.

The next 41 pages *HSCNews International* looks at several new campaigning initiatives in patients' rights.

* Source: Patients' Rights in Europe and the UK, *Patients Association*, December 2005.