

In praise of the UK Caldicott Guardian Council and Caldicott Guardians

Caldicott Guardians play a valuable role in ensuring that data is used responsibly and ethically to support the delivery of better care. They help their organisations to maintain patient confidentiality, and to make wise decisions about data sharing.

As a young consultant, information governance wasn't an area I had much studied outside of the bounds of my own professional obligations. But a single experience changed that, when I found myself under mounting pressure from another organisation to share confidential information about a patient I was treating, against his wishes. They thought that he might be dangerous. Given my knowledge of him it was my professional judgement that he wasn't, and I felt very strongly about his right to privacy. With the wise counsel of my Trust's Caldicott Guardian, Dr Dele Olajide, I was able to navigate this stressful situation and stand my ground. And I did so with the confidence that his authority and expertise had afforded me.

Later, when I took on the Caldicott Guardian role myself, I was able to support others in the same way. But it is not an easy job. Sometimes staff approached me with the opposite problem, anxious about sharing information that they felt did need to be shared, but worried they'd 'get it wrong' and face legal and professional consequences. Caldicott Guardians are frequently called upon to unpick and resolve complicated information sharing issues, often in emotionally charged or pressured circumstances, where the right course of action isn't clear and may require nuanced balancing of competing factors and risks. The recommendations they make can have significant consequences, and so the pressure to 'get it right' often weighs heavy.

This is why it is sometimes referred to as a lonely role. But Caldicott Guardians are never alone, as the UK Caldicott Guardian Council (UKCGC) are there to provide support for Caldicott Guardians and others fulfilling the Caldicott function within their organisation. They are the national body for Caldicott Guardians and offer free, practical resources on the [UKCGC website](#), including the option to request advice from Council.

The UK Caldicott Guardian Council has a new chair

The National Data Guardian has always been proud of its strong ties to the UKCGC, and I recently helped them to recruit their new chair, Dr Arjun Dhillon, to whom I would like to offer a very warm welcome. Arjun will be picking up the baton from Dr Chris Bunch. He is currently a practicing GP at the Argyle Health Group in West London, a clinical director at NHS Digital, and the Caldicott Guardian for both organisations. He has been a Caldicott Guardian at local, regional, and national levels, and a UKCGC council member for several years. Arjun will attend my monthly panel meetings as an observer.

I would also like to offer my sincerest thanks to Dr Chris Bunch, who has been a great support to me, and has done much to help Caldicott Guardians during his five-year tenure as chair, including the development of an online forum, workshops and other helpful information and resources. Chris will stay on as vice chair of the UKCGC, and as a member of my panel.

New elearning: The Role of the Caldicott Guardian

My office recently supported the UKCGC with the development of a new elearning programme, [The Role of the Caldicott Guardian](#).

The programme is for Caldicott Guardians and those interested in finding out more about the role Caldicott Guardians play in keeping people's data safe and ensuring that it is used appropriately. It was developed in partnership with Health Education England.

The elearning consists of three modules, each intended for a different audience. The first, 'Caldicott Guardians: sharing information and protecting confidentiality in health and care', is available now and is a general overview of the role, intended for a broad range of health and care staff. A further two modules will follow: one for new or existing Caldicott Guardians, and one for senior staff who may need to appoint or support a Caldicott Guardian.

To access the elearning, [visit the programme page](#) on Health Education England's elearning for healthcare website. The programme is free for NHS health and care organisations. Others may also qualify for access through OpenAthens and can [check their eligibility online](#).

Guidance about Caldicott Guardians

This elearning was developed to help those who need to implement guidance we published back in August about the [appointment, role and responsibilities of a Caldicott Guardian](#).

This guidance introduces a formal requirement that widens the type and number of organisations who need to appoint a Caldicott Guardian. It is published under the National Data Guardian's power to issue guidance described within the [Health and Social Care \(National Data Guardian\) Act 2018](#), and so those organisations it applies to must have regard to it, and are encouraged to become compliant by 30 June 2023.

This change was a response to a [public consultation held by the NDG in 2020](#) about the Caldicott Principles and Caldicott Guardians. People who responded felt the role needed stronger emphasis across the whole of health and social care, and so the proposal to expand the types of organisations expected to have a Caldicott Guardian received strong support.

I would like to sign off by sending my thanks to all Caldicott Guardians across health and care who are fighting the good fight to uphold the fundamental importance of patient confidentiality so as to preserve trust in the privacy of our health and care system. Their work to ensure that data

across their systems is safeguarded securely and used when appropriate – both for individual care and through research and planning to improve access, experience, and outcomes for all – really matters. It is at times a difficult job, but always an incredibly worthy one.