CLINICAL WARNING ALERTS POLICY
CLINICAL WARNING ALERTS POLICY – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Key Messages</th>
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Principles of Clinical Warning Alerts policy

- Understand and Define Alerts
- Confidentiality and Legal Compliance
- Information Security
- Quality Assurance
- Legal and Related Policies and Guidance
- Clinical Warning Alert Management

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<th>Minimum Implementation Standards</th>
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**Good Practice for Managers**
- Has identified the staff in his or her area to whom this policy applies and has given the policy (or selected excerpts) to them.
- Has assessed the impact of the policy on current working practices, and has an action plan to make all necessary changes to ensure that his or her area complies with the policy.
- Has set up systems to provide assurance to him or her that the policy is being implemented as intended in his or her area of responsibility.

**Good Practice for Employees**
- Has read the policy (or selected excerpts) and considered what it means for him or her, in terms of how to conduct his or her duties.
- Has completed any mandatory education or training that may be required as part of the implementation of the policy.
- Has altered working practices as expected by the policy.
1. Introduction

1.1 NHS Lothian is committed to providing staff with a safe working environment. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework to enable accurate and up to date warning alerts on patients’ healthcare records. It should be noted that this policy only applies to clinical alerts relating to individual patients, and does not apply to generic alerts, which are issued to meet health and safety requirements.

1.2 Patients often present to departments in an unconscious or incoherent state, and are therefore unable to provide staff with information such as known allergies or pre-existing medical conditions that they may have. The nature of healthcare means that staff are often required to deal with patients and visitors in stressful and emotional circumstances.

1.3 This policy on information sharing within NHS Lothian will lead to better quality healthcare for all users and staff within NHS Lothian premises and patients’ homes.

2 Definition of Clinical Warning Alert

2.1 A clinical warning alert is defined as information, or a link to such information, which is placed in a prominent position within a patient’s health record or clinical information system. This alert highlights to staff potential risks to either the patient or to the staff member. The information contained within the alert must be of sufficient significance that if it were not available to staff there would be a significant risk to the patient’s immediate health and/or clinical care during future healthcare episodes, or reduces the staff member’s ability to treat a patient effectively.

Examples of relevant clinical warning alerts are child protection status, known drug allergies and side effects or haemophilia status.

3 The Legal/Ethical Framework

3.1 There are three main areas of law that need to be observed within the use of warning alerts; the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA)1, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA)2 and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)3. As with all information flows within the NHS, observance of and adherence to the Caldicott Principles must be followed.

3.2 As a public authority, NHS Lothian is required to act in a manner compatible with the rights conferred to citizens under the Human Rights Act 19981. Article 8 of the Act, which states that “Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence,” is of particular relevance.
3.3 Section 2 of HASAWA places a general duty of safety in the workplace on employers to its employees. Section 7 of the Act places a general duty of safety in the workplace on employees to their employer and fellow employees.

3.4 It is essential that in setting up systems of this nature that the information is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the six Principles of good Data Protection Practice that support it. This policy has been developed in accordance with the NHS Lothian Data Protection Policy.

3.5 This policy has been developed in accordance with best practice guidance. Professional Staff registered with any of the healthcare regulatory authority must adhere to their respective professional codes of conduct when processing this type of information. Non-compliance of this policy may result in a healthcare professional being subject to ‘fitness to practice’ proceedings.

4 Principle Standards for management of clinical warning alerts

4.1 Executive responsibility for the management of clinical warning alerts lies with the Director of Public Health and Policy in their role as Caldicott Guardian for NHS Lothian.

4.1.1 Initial processing or addition of clinical warning alerts information is the responsibility of appropriately nominated and trained registered health professionals employed by NHS Lothian. Such staff will be responsible and professionally accountable for the management of any warning alerts that they add manually or electronically to a patient’s healthcare record.

4.2 Clinical warning alerts must only be added to healthcare records when there is an urgent clinical need for the information to be made available to staff. The information contained within the alert should be deemed necessary if a patient presents for treatment in either an unconscious state, is unable to communicate to a care provider such information or is necessary to protect the vital interests of the patient.

4.2.1 The alert must meet the fair and lawful processing requirement of the First Principle of Data Protection. Under normal circumstances, the patient must consent to the warning alert being added to their records.

4.3 The alert must have a pre-defined expiry and/or review date. The review timescales may be variable, dependent on the nature of the alert and should be of relevance to the condition it relates to, and therefore may be of a permanent nature.
### 4.3.1 All alerts, whether electronically or manually generated, form part of the patient’s historical clinical record. When an alert is no longer deemed necessary, it must be removed from the record so as not to prejudice or cause potential harm to the patient. For electronic record alerts, it must be hidden from general view. For manual record alerts, it must be removed with an entry in the record indicating the nature of the alert and the date it was added and subsequently removed.

### 4.4 Access to clinical warning alerts must be controlled and accessed on a strict ‘need to know’ basis.

### 4.5 The alert must be sufficiently prominent on an IT system and/or manual health record to enable those staff with a need to know to readily identify and access the alert. It is not considered good practice to place such potentially important information within a general ‘free text’ or ‘admin’ field within an electronic system.

### 4.6 This policy does not have any influence on, nor should change any current practice on staff recording information in a clinical record. Creation of a warning alert is an additional process to recording a clinical condition as part of the clinical care process. As described in 4.3.1 above, a warning alert does form part of a clinical record, but should only be added to a record when necessary.

### Review

The NHS Lothian Information Governance Assurance Group will review this policy, and any changes to this Policy will be managed in accordance with the NHS Lothian standing instructions governing Policy Review. Any substantial changes to the law or Scottish Government guidance will be adopted as issued and will be relayed to the Partnership Forum and the Healthcare Governance Steering Group.
References

1 Human Rights Act 1998

2 Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

3 Data Protection Act 2018

NHS Lothian Data Protection Policy

NHS Lothian Confidentiality Policy
## DOCUMENT TITLE: CLINICAL WARNING ALERTS POLICY

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<td>1</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td>Alison McCallum Director of Public Health and Health</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>April 2014</td>
<td>Alison McCallum Director of Public Health and Health Policy</td>
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