

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information [\[guidance\]](#)

Title and link to statistical output	General Practice Workforce 31 December 2019 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/general-practice-workforce-31-december-2019
Name of producer organisation	NHS Digital
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Sunita Wilkhu, NHS Digital sunita.wilkhu1@nhs.net Jane Tocher NHS Digital jane.tocher@nhs.net
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	N/A
Date of breach report	11Mar2020

2. Circumstances of breach [\[guidance\]](#)

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Accidental or wrongful early release (Practices T3.3, T3.4)
Date of occurrence of breach	26Feb2020
<p>The General Practice Workforce 31 December 2019 publication was sent out for pre-release at 09:30 on the 26th February 2020.</p> <p>The restrictions around sharing were clearly marked on all material that had been shared with people on the pre-release list.</p> <p>The data breach occurred within NHS England and Improvement outside of the standard data sharing process with PRA colleagues undertaken by the briefing co-ordinator.</p> <p>A spreadsheet used to model and project GP supply and demand in England was updated with the national GP figures taken from the pre-release material and shared internally with an Analytical Lead at NHS England and Improvement who was not included on the PRA list for the publication.</p> <p>The breach was identified by the Analytical Lead themselves. In the course of a one-to-one phone call with a colleague at DHSC to discuss the supply and demand spreadsheet, he identified that he was not on the PRA list himself when he had asked the DHSC colleague to confirm that they were on the PRA list.</p>	

3. Impact of the breach [\[guidance\]](#)

<p>The Analytical Lead responded to the sender of the email containing the spreadsheet stating they should not have had access to the data as they were not on the PRA list. Another recipient on the PRA list, who was cc'd into the response from the Analytical Lead, then informed the briefing co-ordinator for the publication of the breach on the 26th February.</p> <p>The briefing co-ordinator informed NHS Digital of the breach on the 4th March 2020.</p> <p>This delay was due to a number of factors. The briefing co-ordinator requested further details of the breach from the colleague who had first informed her of it. Due to a broader issue at NHS England where changes were made to spam filters, the response, which was received on the 27th February, went into the briefing co-ordinator's junk folder and was then not picked up until the 4th March 2020.</p>

The Analytical Lead was given sight of national GP figures only from the pre-release publication and did not receive any of the data spreadsheets shared as part of the pre-release email sent by NHS Digital to the briefing co-ordinators.

The Analytical Lead has confirmed that he did not share the data with anyone else and that he had only seen the national GP level figures featured in the supply and demand model.

Given the fact that limited data was shared with only person internally within NHS England, we believe that this is a low impact breach.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence[\[guidance\]](#)

Statistical Governance reported the incident to the Head of Profession for Statistics immediately once notified by the briefing co-ordinator at NHS England and Improvement of the breach.

The breach at NHS England occurred as the result of an analytical process which involves sharing updated workforce modelling projections to support discussions with ministers on progress against the 6,000 GP government manifesto target.

To ensure data breaches are avoided in future, NHS England briefing co-ordinators and wider PRA colleagues will undertake the following activity:

- Discuss current PRA processes with the analytical team to establish their purpose, what the tool is used for on PRA day by DHSC and whether this can be postponed and shared on publication day instead to reduce the risk of unauthorised access to the data.
- When data is shared by the briefing co-ordinator with PRA colleagues a list of those included on the PRA will be highlighted in the body text of the email, as well as attached within a separate document as is currently the practice.
- When gathering contact details for those to be included on the PRA list each quarter, the briefing co-ordinator will specifically highlight in the body of the request that any and all colleagues who will require access to the data on PRA day will need to be included and reinforce the message that sharing of the data with any colleagues not included on this list is a breach of Government Statistical Service Code of Practice and is required to be reported and may lead to an investigation.
- Details of this breach have been escalated to NHS England senior workforce colleagues who will be taking action to ensure the importance of not sharing this data with those not authorised to access it is reiterated and that further action will be taken if further breaches occur due to the negligence of individuals involved in the pre-release.
- The current briefing co-ordinator has also created a process map which outlines PRA briefing co-ordinator processes. This will be updated to also include analytical standard PRA processes for monitoring and awareness.

The broader issue of emails going straight into junk folders as a result of changes to spam filters has been reviewed and resolved by the NHS England IT department as of 11 March 2020.