Electronic prescribing (ePrescribing) systems have the potential to increase the safety and efficiency of healthcare. Currently there is limited experience or knowledge of how best to set up these systems in the UK. Our team is developing an online toolkit that will support hospitals to go through the process of setting up an ePrescribing system.

This paper looks at how the toolkit might provide support for those setting up ePrescribing systems in UK hospitals. Creating a user friendly technology and a user friendly toolkit require input from the users themselves. Therefore we designed a questionnaire and gave it out to pharmacists, National Health Service (NHS) managers, information technology (IT) staff, doctors and suppliers of ePrescribing systems, who were at a national conference on ePrescribing. The questionnaire asked what people needed at different stages in the process of setting up an ePrescribing system. We used the answers to help determine how useful it might be to have an ePrescribing toolkit for hospitals and what content it should have to make it most helpful.

We found that there was great interest in having a toolkit that could give more help with setting up ePrescribing systems. We found that the toolkit would be most useful if it provided guidance for each stage of setting up a system. It should have online tools for planning and overseeing the system as well as useful information from hospitals that had already been through the process. People were aware of the challenges of developing a toolkit that was general enough to help different hospitals across the country but at the same time could be specific enough to help particular groups of people in particular settings.

We conclude that there is clearly a need for more support for hospitals setting up and using ePrescribing systems. An online toolkit can offer reliable and up-to-date help. A toolkit also allows its users to share their experiences and ideas. We realise that the value of a toolkit will only become more evident once it is being widely used and people can share their knowledge and experience. This questionnaire study was only the first step in creating an ePrescribing toolkit. Future research should seek views from a wider range of users, and especially from hospital patients whose care will be affected by ePrescribing systems.