

MOBILE PHONE POLICY

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Mobile Phone Policy

Introduction

There have been significant advances in technology during the past few years, particularly in the area of wireless devices such as mobile phones (many of which now include camera/video capability and sound recording), laptop computers, palmtops and other devices fitted with GPRS and/or 3G Hiperlan).

It is recognised that the use of modern mobile phones has little or no effect on **modern clinical equipment** unless operated within close proximity, **less than two metres** (Device Bulletins DB9702 "Electromagnetic compatibility of medical devices with Mobile Communications", issued by MHRA in July 2004, together with updates, including @one liner issue 43 in July 2006 and Dept of Health update May 2007).

There are still significant numbers of older medical devices in use which **do not conform to the modern immunity levels** and are therefore, much more vulnerable to interference. Although the risk is not as great as first envisaged, there does remain an element of risk which must not be ignored when using mobile phones and other digital equipment within proximity to medical equipment.

All mobile phones and devices fitted with GPRS emit radio frequency signals in standby mode as well as when in use. Their power increases when an incoming call or other communication from the base station is received, whether the call is answered or not. The power radiated by these devices also increases when used in poor signal strength areas.

Considerations

The Department of Health recommends (DH 2006) that mobile phones, and all electronic equipment that transmits radio-frequency energy above a very low power level, are only permitted to be switched on and used in specifically designated areas well away from possible interference with medical devices (eg. Non-clinical areas, such as; ward day rooms and waiting areas, etc).

There is also a need to balance the patient's welfare and environment against the need for appropriate communication between staff, visitors, patients and their family and friends. Whenever anyone is in hospital, communication with family and friends becomes an essential element of support and comfort.

A major development has been the widespread use of combined mobile phones and cameras, many of which have video recording capability and music players. It is the potential for patients and visitors to use this functionality to take inappropriate photographs or videos that presents the **greatest potential to interfere with dignity and privacy and thus compromise patient confidentiality**.

Many swimming pools, sports centres and schools ban the use of mobiles because of the camera facility incorporated in them, recognising that it is very difficult to detect whether such devices are actually being used to take pictures and videos. The **Children Act 2004** obligates each NHS Trust to ensure they safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Camera phones in particular are seen as a potential risk of inappropriate photographs being taken.

Overall, the control of camera phones may only be seen to be practically possible by preventing the use of mobile phones altogether in clinical areas.

In addition, **mobile phone ring tones may be confused with medical device alarm signals by hospital staff.** This, in turn, means that genuine alarm tones may be overlooked, thereby having a direct impact on **patient safety.**

The use of mobile phones can be intrusive, and impact adversely on the environment of others. Patients have a right to, and a need for, a peaceful environment, both at day and at night time, uninterrupted by a number of different ring tones, the noise of which is disrespectful of their privacy and dignity.

The Trust as an employer also has a legal responsibility to protect the Health and Safety of its employees. Therefore, staff should **not use their mobile phone whilst driving or doing anything else where safety is important and where its use might interfere with concentration.**

Recommendations:

- The use of mobile phones is **prohibited** in all high tech equipment areas such as: **ITU, CCU, HDU, NICU, A&E, ANSTY, THEATRES** or **where patients are attached to complex medical devices including infusion pumps.**
- Only staff who can demonstrate that using a mobile phone in these areas are **essential** to fulfil their duties, are permitted to use them but not within **Two Metres of a Medical Device.**
- In recognition of the need for **patient confidentiality, privacy and dignity** mobile phones with **camera facilities must not be switched on in the vicinity of patients.** It is very difficult to detect whether such devices are taking pictures. The taking of photos or videos in ward areas should only be allowed when the subject patient has given specific consent. It is essential that only those who have given written consent are included in any photo. A member of Hospital staff must be present when pictures are taken.
- Staff using their mobile telephones whether for personal use during a break period or in the course of their duties, must do so taking into consideration the location where they are making the call, whether or not it will distract colleagues and whether or not the nature of the telephone conversation is **inappropriate in front of patients / visitors** to the hospital. It is common courtesy to take account of the fact that colleagues, patients or visitors may not wish to have the intrusion of your telephone conversations.
- This policy reflects the Health and Safety Executive Guidance that as employers the Trust has a legal responsibility to protect the health and safety of its employees.
Accordingly, staff should **not use mobile telephones whilst driving** or doing anything else where safety is important and where the use of a mobile telephone might interfere with concentration. **In general, staff should refrain from using their mobile telephones during work times, unless required in the direct course of their duties.**

MOBILE PHONE WARNING

**Mobile phone transmissions can
affect medical electronic equipment.**

**In the interest of patient safety and privacy,
patients, staff and visitors are requested to refrain from
using their mobile phones unless absolutely essential.**

Essential use is only permitted in

non-clinical areas

such as corridors, day rooms, reception and waiting areas.

Thank you for your co-operation.