

News story: Health and Social Care Secretary bans pagers from the NHS

NHS trusts will be required to phase out pagers by the end of 2021. All hospitals will be expected to have plans and infrastructure in place to ensure this is possible by the end of September 2020.

Staff will instead use modern alternatives, such as mobile phones and apps. These can deliver more accurate 2-way communications at a reduced cost.

A pilot project at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (WSFT) in 2017 saved junior doctors 48 minutes per shift and nurses 21 minutes on average.

The NHS uses around 130,000 pagers at an annual cost of £6.6 million. More than one in 10 of the world's pagers are used by the NHS.

Most mobile phone companies have phased out support for pagers, leaving only one provider in the UK. This means a single device can cost up to £400.

Removing pagers brings a number of benefits to NHS staff:

- Pagers only offer a one-way form of communication. The recipient is unaware who is contacting them, the reasons why, or the level of urgency. This can interrupt work, waste time, make the prioritisation of tasks difficult and the evidence trail of communications is limited.
- Pagers do not support the sharing of information between staff on the move. Mobile phones and apps are able to do all of this more quickly and at a reduced cost.

NHS trusts will be allowed to keep some pagers for emergency situations, such as when wifi fails or when other forms of communication are unavailable.

The WSFT pilot project used Medic Bleep, a messaging and calling system similar to Whatsapp, with enhanced data protection.

The move to replace pagers with modern technology is the next step in achieving a fully digitised NHS – a crucial part of the [tech vision](#) and the [NHS Long Term Plan](#).

Digital services and IT systems used by the NHS will soon have to meet a clear set of open standards to ensure they can talk to each other across organisational boundaries and can be continuously upgraded.

Any system which does not meet these standards will be phased out and the government will look to end contracts with providers which do not understand these principles for the health and care sector.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Every day, our wonderful NHS staff work incredibly hard in what can be challenging and high-pressured environments. The last thing they need are the frustrations of having to deal with outdated technology – they deserve the very best equipment to help them do their jobs.

We have to get the basics right, like having computers that work and getting rid of archaic technology like pagers and fax machines. Email and mobile phones are a more secure, quicker and cheaper way to communicate which allow doctors and nurses to spend more time caring for patients rather than having to work round outdated kit.

We want to build a health and care service which is fully able to harness the huge potential of technology. This will save lives, support hard-working staff and deliver the cutting-edge care set out by our Long Term Plan for the NHS.

WSFT medical director, Nick Jenkins, said:

As a global digital exemplar trust, we're always keen to explore new digital opportunities that could improve experience for staff and patients.

There is scope for Medic Bleep to be used for everything from arranging shift cover to sharing patient observations. For us, it's about a digital tool helping our communications to become more efficient. Contact with other clinicians can be made much more easily than with a physical bleep, and responses are much quicker. All that time we save can be spent caring for patients, so we benefit, but more importantly, our patients benefit too.