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### Original Citation

White, Stephen, Humphreys, Paul and Topping, Annie (2015) Evaluating Mobile Device Cleaning Policies in the NHS. In: Infection Prevention Society Conference 2015, 28th - 30th September 2015, Liverpool, UK.

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# Evaluating Mobile Device Cleaning Policies in the NHS

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*'We want to maximise the benefits of patient safety from new technology and, at the same time, minimise any risks that the new technology itself could introduce.'*

Dr. Maureen Baker CBE, Clinical Director for Patient Safety at NHS Connecting for Health

## 1. Introduction

- The use of mobile devices within healthcare settings by staff, patients and visitors is widespread and growing.
- Department of Health guidance states that patients should be allowed the widest possible use of mobile phones (DH, 2009).
- For staff mobile devices have become an essential aspect of their day-to-day professional and personal lives.
- There is, however, clear evidence that phones/tablets can be contaminated with pathogens, which may survive for prolonged periods before being transferred onto hands or other surfaces (White et al, 2012).
- This study evaluates current policy in the NHS, for mobile device cleaning & disinfection practices.

## 2. Methods

- A Freedom of Information request was made for: *"all current policies or guidelines that make reference to the use and management of mobile phones and tablet devices in the healthcare environment, by staff, service users, and visitors. This applies to both personal and institutionally-owned devices"*.
- This request was sent to the Department of Health, NHS England, Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland, NHS Wales, and 264 NHS Organisations:
  - 158 Acute Trusts in England,
  - 50 Mental Health Trusts in England,
  - 10 Ambulance Service Trusts in England,
  - 22 Health and Care Trusts in England,
  - 14 Regional NHS Boards in Scotland, and
  - 10 institutions in Wales (7 Local Health Boards, 2 NHS Trusts, and Public Health Wales)).

**Response rate 98% (n=265)**

## 3. Results

- 22% of organisations had no policy in place, with ≈11% stating that this would be considered in future policy reviews.
- Organisations that acknowledged the issue responded that staff were informed of disinfection procedures: e.g. 'the normal cleaning schedule' or the use of universal sanitizing/detergent wipes.
- Many organisations referred to their Cleaning and Decontamination policy, however none of these policies, when scrutinised, explicitly mentioned mobile devices.
- Instead, the general advice for electrical devices was to follow manufacturer's instructions, as using any other process might invalidate warranties – with mobile devices this is 'a lint free cloth'.
- Where specific cleaning policies were in place they advocated the use of 'general purpose/universal detergent wipes' without any technical justification or reference to current research,
- Multiple organisations suggested that existing hand decontamination procedures were sufficient to address this issue.
- Decontamination of service users', carers', or visitors' mobile devices did not feature in any policy.

## 4. Discussion

- There is no consistency across the NHS in infection control advice regarding the potential risks posed by the use of mobile devices.
- Regular cleaning/disinfection may be a solution, but there is little evidence evaluating the available methods.
- The evidence that does exist regarding effective cleaning/disinfection of mobile devices, is not being used to inform policy.
- The literature in this field calls for clear evidence-based guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting mobile devices.

## References

1. DH (2009) Using mobile phones in NHS hospitals. London, Stationery Office.
2. White, S., Topping, A., Humphreys, P., Rout, S., & Williamson, H. (2012). The cross-contamination potential of mobile telephones. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 17(6), 582-595. doi:10.1177/1744987112458670