

Public release date: 13-Oct-2006

Contact: Emma Dickinson

EDickinson@bmj.com

44-020-738-36529

[BMJ-British Medical Journal](#)

Concern over new rules on mobile phones in hospitals

Use of mobile phones in hospitals BMJ Volume 333 pp 767-8

Restrictions were originally put in place because of concerns about patient safety. But a lack of evidence has led the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to propose a relaxation of restrictions.

This relaxation is welcome, say the authors, but they warn that fresh anxieties are leading to a new wave of regulations that are even more restrictive than the old ones.

For example, the Department of Health has recommended that camera phones should not be allowed in hospitals because they may undermine the privacy of patients, and it has also suggested that some ring tones might be mistaken for medical device alarms.

The most important concern with mobile phones is interference with sensitive medical equipment, but a study by the Medical Devices Agency found that, in general, the interference was merely an irritation and ultimately harmless to the patient, they write.

Beeping, ringing, and singing ring tones can also be a nuisance, but do not endanger patients.

Mobile phones also have many benefits, they add. A recent survey of American Anaesthesiologists found that only 2.4% had ever experienced interference between a medical device and a mobile. In contrast 15% indicated that a delay in communication had led to a medical error or injury, and such delays were less frequent among those who used mobiles instead of pagers.

The authors believe that doctors and pharmacists would benefit from using mobile phones rather than pagers, and many patients in hospital would welcome the opportunity to relieve their isolation without resorting to expensive hospital phones that are cumbersome to use.

They urge hospital managers and clinical directors to adopt a more flexible approach to the use of mobile phones on the basis that the advantages clearly outweigh their largely mythical risks.

###
