

Senior Minister declares handheld computers for clinicians “part of the future” of the NHS

VitalPAC, the electronic personal assistant for clinicians, should be rolled out across the health service, the minister responsible for cross-Government policy has said.

Cabinet Office minister Oliver Letwin saw VitalPAC in use at his local hospital in Dorchester. The system enables clinicians to capture information about a patient’s condition on an iPod touch and iPad, in real time, at their bedside or in their home, rather than on paper charts.

The handheld device alerts clinicians if a patient’s condition is deteriorating, and uploads data to the hospital computer system so other clinicians can access it remotely to check on their patients.

After the visit to Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Mr Letwin said: *“This is a fantastic way to use new technology and it is obviously hugely useful. Now we just need to see it spread.”*

“It is an obvious way of using new technology to achieve a much better grip on what’s happening to each individual patient.

“It is also a way of integrating hospital care with care in the community, so it’s definitely part of the world’s future.

Mr Letwin is Minister for Government Policy, with a brief that ranges across all Whitehall Departments.

VitalPAC is in use in 45 hospitals across England. A recent article in BMJ Quality and Safety found death rates at two large hospitals fell 15% after nurses started using VitalPAC instead of paper charts to record patients’ vital signs.

VitalPAC has also been shown to deliver:

- 17% shorter length of stay
- 95% reduction in norovirus outbreaks
- 70% fewer cardiac arrests
- Return on investment greater than 4:1

As well as using VitalPAC on its wards, Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has used the system to launch a Hospital at Home service. This works like a ‘virtual’ ward and enables patients to remain under the care of hospital specialists whilst being looked after at home. The programme has reduced avoidable acute admissions and facilitated earlier hospital discharge.

Hospital nurses and Health Care Assistants provide the service seven days a week for up to 10 patients at any time. Staff record patient vital signs and calculate Early Warning Scores on each visit using VitalPAC on mobile phones.

The net saving to the trust of this ten-bedded scheme totalled £285,000 over five months, equivalent to £680,000 pa.

Dr Peter Greengross, Medical Director at The Learning Clinic said: *“VitalPAC is making a significant impact in helping hospitals like Dorset County Hospital to deliver higher quality, safer, more efficient care for patients and I am delighted Mr Letwin was able to see it in action.”*