

Protecting
your NHS



Press Release

2nd March 2005

NHS ANGELS GET THEIR OWN GUARDIAN

NHS staff who work on their own in the community will have their very own guardian angel in the form of a high-tech protection device Health Secretary John Reid announced today.

Resembling a normal ID card holder, the device - called identicom - uses the latest mobile technology to protect them in uncomfortable situations.

NHS staff faced with a potentially violent situation can covertly activate an alert, putting them through to a 24-hour call centre that can assist in the location of the member of staff and arrange for help to be sent by the police.

The device also allows a phone line to be opened and sound from violent incidents recorded, which could then be used as part of any subsequent legal action.

Health Secretary John Reid said:

"I am determined to do everything within my power to stop NHS staff suffering from violence and abuse. They dedicate their lives to caring for the sick and in return they deserve respect. Anybody who attacks our staff will face tough action and the possibility of jail.

"Up to 100,000 staff work alone in the NHS everyday and thanks to this device they will have the knowledge that help is only a button away. As recordings of incidents can be used as evidence in court hearings, it also offers the police and the NHS Security Management Service valuable information in punishing these criminals."

Health Visitor Anne Lewis a health visitor for North Liverpool PCT works alone, visiting families in their homes in the districts of Fazakerley, Walton and Aintree areas of Liverpool. Anne, who has been trailing the device says she feels much safer:

"I visit up to 10 families a day and although problems are rare you never know what you might encounter.

"The device is easy to use, it records my whereabouts each time I walk up to a house for an appointment meaning that I can always be tracked down.

"It is also very discreet; it doesn't look like a panic alarm which means that I can secretly activate the alarm without arousing the suspicion of the patient and potentially inflaming the situation."

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Counter Fraud and
Security Management Service

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Also launched today is 'Not Alone: Protecting NHS Lone Workers.' The guidance offers the NHS a comprehensive range of professional techniques and practical solutions to better protect NHS lone workers on-site and in the community. These include:

- NHS bodies will need to ensure that all lone workers are fully trained in conflict resolution and risk assessment;
- NHS lone workers should have prior knowledge of any potential risks posed by patients or relatives before making community visits i.e. a history of violence.
- The "Buddy System" – through regular contact a nominated colleague ensures that the lone worker is safe and secure;

Jim Gee, Chief Executive of the NHS Security Management Service (NHS SMS) said:

"The NHS Security Management Service (NHS SMS) has now successfully completed trials of the Identicom device. We have also negotiated arrangements to significantly reduce its price in what represents an excellent deal for the NHS.

"NHS staff said they felt safer and more at ease in their working environment when using this device and I hope that NHS organisations take advantage of the opportunities which are now presented to properly protect lone workers.

"Identicom is one of a range of measures we are taking to protect lone workers in the NHS from violence and abuse. These are detailed in the new guidance which we are launching today. We know that the better we can protect NHS staff, the better they can protect the health of the public."

Sheelagh Brewer, Employment Relations Advisor at the Royal College of Nursing said:

"Nurses working in the community can find themselves in isolated and potentially dangerous situations. It is essential that they have access to a system for raising help and ideally one which identifies their whereabouts. This combined with procedures to identify risk and put preventive measures in place will help nurses feel safer."

June Chandler, Chief Officer of UNISON Healthcare said:

"UNISON welcomes the new guidance for the better protection of lone workers in the NHS. It also supports devices such as the Identicom system that can help to ensure the safety and security of staff exposed to the threat of violence at work. Lone workers have an important role in the delivery

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of modern community health services. They also have a right to work safely and any measure that helps to ensure their safety is to be applauded.”

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Notes to Editors

1. Health Secretary John Reid announced the trials of the device in December 2003 as part of the new Security Management Strategy. Trials were undertaken by 100 NHS lone workers of different types at 22 NHS organisations throughout England.
2. In 2002/03 there were 116,000 incidents of abuse in the NHS (verbal and physical). The NHS SMS took responsibility for work to tackle this problem in December 2003 and began introducing proper definitions of violence and reporting system
3. On 20 January 2004, Norman Hutchins, 53, who in June 2004 became the first person ever to receive a NHS-wide Anti-Social Behaviour Order, was imprisoned for three years for harassing NHS staff and obtaining gowns and surgical masks by deception. He was sentenced on 6 counts of deception, 1 count of affray and 1 count of possession of a bladed article (this count involves Mr. Hutchins threatening a NHS security guard with a knife).
4. Details of how the NHS can find out more about the device is available in the new NHS lone worker protection policy, developed by the NHS Security Management Service. Media copies are available at www.cfsms.nhs.uk or by contacting the NHS Security Management Service Media Team on 020 7895 4523/4524.
5. The NHS Security Management Service have been working in conjunction with a wide range of lone worker charities and NHS stakeholders including the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the British Medical Association, UNISON and the Royal College of Nursing.
6. A new state-of-the-art training centre for NHS Security Management was officially opened in Coventry during April 2004. It will not only train NHS staff in conflict resolution but will train the new Local Security Management Specialists (LSMS) who will lead local work to protect staff and manage security in their designated NHS organisations.
7. For further information please contact Sally Aldous at the Department of Health Media Centre on 020 7210 5230 or the NHS Security Management Service Press Office on 020 7895 4523/4524.

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