

25 April 2006

Gateway Ref: 6496

Review of the Bedside television and telephone systems.

The Office of Communications concluded an investigation into the price of telephone calls to the bedside telephone systems in January 2006. No further action will be taken by Ofcom at this time. However, it still has concerns about the level of charges for incoming calls to hospital patients.

The Department of Health (DH) has set up a Review Group to consider the concerns of Ofcom. It includes representation from DH, the NHS, Connecting for Health, patient representation, the service providers, DH Commercial Solicitors, Healthcare Commission and Ofcom.

The Review Group is due to report its findings to Ministers in June 2006.

The terms of reference of the Review Group are shown at annex A.

You may have been contacted by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health who are currently conducting a patient survey regarding the cost of the bedside entertainment systems which they have titled "Fair talk".

NHS Estates commissioned BMRB to conduct a Bedside TVs and telephones Survey of users, staff, providers and patient representatives in November 2004, which it published in March 2005. 327 patients and 97 staff were interviewed at six hospitals across the country. This survey found:

Almost all patients (88%) said they were satisfied with the service offered by the system, with 30 % saying they were very satisfied.

Perceptions of the system were generally good. The majority (93%) of patients found the system easy to use, and over half (54%) found it very easy to use.

72% of patients and 51% of staff thought the system services offered good value for money.

DH has received a number of queries around issues arising from current contracts and contracts under negotiation. Please note these are for local negotiation between the trust and supplier. DH is not in a position to advise on individual contracts. DH is currently taking legal advice around some of the issues arising and will post its findings on the DH website in due course.

For further information about the review or for a copy of the BMRB Patient survey please contact Melanie Kay, Department of Health. Tel: 0113 2546735. Email: melanie.kay@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Review Group Terms of Reference

Department of Health

Patient Power Review Group

Terms of Reference

Purpose

- The Patient Power Review Group (PPRG) will be responsible for reviewing existing contracts with the NHS and service providers to identify ways of addressing the concerns expressed in the recent Ofcom investigation. In summary, these were to ensure that patients and the NHS get best value from the contracts while the service providers are not disadvantaged in the market place. The intention is to produce an agreed framework that would enable NHS Trusts and the providers of the service to modify their existing agreements.

Terms of Reference

1. Review all aspects of the charging structure:
 - Level of inbound call charges,
 - Requirement to cap outbound call charges at the standard national call rate,
 - The availability of some free TV and radio, and free TV for children,
 - Whether the cross subsidisation across the various services is appropriate or desirable,
 - Whether it is appropriate for a recorded message to be played in its entirety at the outset of each and every call
2. Review the requirement to install, with limited clinical exceptions, units at every bedside within a hospital site, irrespective of use. Could this be altered in respect of all new installations and the repair and renewal of units already installed?
3. Review the requirement to offer services through a combined unit, offering television and telephone and capable of offering added value services. It should consider not only the extent to which NHS Trusts have made use of the added functionality (or could make use in the future) but should consider what the appropriate minimum standards should be for all future installations and renewals.
4. Review and clarify the guidance issued by DH in respect of NHS Trusts exercising their own discretion in determining the local policy on the use of mobile phones in hospitals.

Meetings and Output

- The PPRG will meet in February to agree its terms of reference, work plan and subsequent progress meetings.
- It will report in June 2006.