



## Shortage of supplies, missing medical equipment and misplaced patient records making NHS Nurses' lives a misery

*Patient care at risk reveals survey from GS1 UK and Nursing Standard*

- 26 days each year<sup>1</sup> (per nurse) and £1 billion<sup>1</sup> of NHS nurses' wages spent on hunting for missing equipment
- Patient records and lab results go missing at least once a day according to over a quarter of hospital nurses
- Only 10% of nurses feel they have the time to check patient records thoroughly all the time
- Nearly a third (31%) of nurses believe the use of physical patient records, instead of electronic systems, are responsible for causing problems with patient care
- Nurses call for technology to reduce patient safety incidents – 44% of nurses feel that bar-coded wristbands would reduce patient safety incidents by over 50%
- 5.5% (equating to 21,738<sup>2</sup>) of hospital nursing staff resort to asking patients to locate items on wards

**LONDON, 28 April 2010** – The UK's 400,000 NHS secondary care nurses are spending almost four hours each week searching for medication, patient records and medical devices according to a survey by [GS1 UK](http://www.gs1uk.org), the not for profit data standards and solutions organisation, in conjunction with Nursing Standard.

The research carried out among 861 nurses from across the UK, highlights that the treatment of hospital patients is being jeopardised as over a third (35%) of nurses face daily shortages of medical supplies, and one in four (26%) admit that patient records and lab results go missing at least once a day.

For the NHS, this could mean that over £1 billion of salary expenditure - equivalent to 26 days lost each year per nurse - is being spent on fruitless searching for medical items that could be located instantly by using coding technology.

Frustrated nurses believe that everyday supermarket style bar code scanning technology could help alleviate the problem. However only 12% of respondents currently use such technology to help them locate items on the ward. The most popular technologies called for by nurses to help them perform their roles better included real time view of stock levels (63%), electronic records to track location of equipment (56%) and bar-coded wristbands to accurately identify patients (37%). Forty-four per cent of survey respondents also felt that bar-coded wristbands would help to significantly reduce patient safety incidents by over 50%.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on calculations using statistics from NHS Information Centre ([www.ic.nhs.uk](http://www.ic.nhs.uk)) (mean basic pay for qualified nurses: £29,200 & [Total Qualified Nursing Staff 2009](#): 395,229), average amount of time nurses spend searching for medical equipment (47.4 minutes per day) and average eight hour shift (equates to 205.4 hours per year)

<sup>2</sup> 21,738 figure based on statistics from NHS Information Centre ([www.ic.nhs.uk](http://www.ic.nhs.uk)). [Total Qualified Nursing Staff 2009](#)



With the General Election looming, the performance of the NHS is unsurprisingly coming under increased scrutiny. Ministers are under pressure to set out plans to reduce public spending and with an annual budget of over £100bn, the issue of NHS funding and how standards are maintained has become a key part of the debate.

Gary Lynch, chief executive of GS1 UK said, “Despite political caution about committing to cutting funding to the NHS, it is generally accepted that services will, at least, face a freeze on spending increases over the next few years. Optimising hospital ward efficiency is therefore absolutely paramount.

“With all the pressure nurses are under to deliver quality care, it’s sad to see that hunting for missing equipment is wasting so much of their time, especially when they are having to look for even basic care provisions such as bed linen and feed drips,” added Lynch.

Graham Scott, editor of Nursing Standard said, ‘This survey clearly demonstrates that simple changes to the way wards are organised can have a major impact on the ability of nurses to provide high quality patient care. It is alarming that one in four nurses admit they rarely have enough time to check patients’ records thoroughly before treating them.

‘There are plenty of hospitals that have successfully streamlined their systems, and it is vital that the others now follow suit so that nurses do not continue wasting valuable time searching for equipment and supplies.’

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#### **Notes to editors:**

The survey was run in conjunction with Nursing Standard from 31st March 2010 – 14th April 2010. The survey included 861 nurses from across the UK.

#### **Key findings:**

##### **Top five missing items:**

Consumables, e.g. dressings (57%), medicines (54%), medical devices e.g. IV drips (53%), hard copies of patient records (47%), assistive devices, e.g. wheelchairs (28%)

##### **Top three technologies desired by nurses to help perform their roles better:**

Real time view of stock levels 63%, electronic records to track location of equipment 56%, barcoded wristbands 37%

#### **Other key stats:**

- 89% of nurses spent time to locate missing items themselves, 86% ask fellow nurses to do so
- Only 25% of nurses surveyed report shortages all the time
- Of those who do not report supply shortages admit this is due to lack of time (53%), having to do too much paperwork as it is (35%) or because there is no formal reporting system in place (28%)



- Nurses believe that problems in patient care arise as a result of:
  - Overworked nurses (79%)
  - Not having enough time to thoroughly check patient records before administering treatment (69%)
  - Human error (66%)
  - Overworked doctors (55%)
  - Shortage of equipment / medical supplies (48%)
  - Sharing patient records between nurses on different shifts (25%)
- Almost a quarter (23%) of nurses admit they rarely have enough time to thoroughly check patients' medical records before administering treatment

### Figures

[Total Qualified Nursing Staff 2009](#) - **395,229** (Qualified nursing, midwifery & health visiting staff, bank nursing, midwifery & health visiting staff – Nursing and midwifery figures exclude students on training courses to a first qualification as a nurse or midwife).

[NHS Staff Earnings October - December 2009](#) – mean basic pay for qualified nurses: £29,200.

### About GS1 UK

GS1 UK has driven innovation in the supply chain for over thirty years. It is part of the global GS1 organisation, dedicated to the development and implementation of global data standards and solutions for the supply chain. The GS1 System is the most widely used supply chain standards system in the world. GS1 UK helps industry to implement these data standards through the use of bar codes, RFID, Global Data Synchronisation (GDS) and electronic business messaging. [www.gs1uk.org](http://www.gs1uk.org)

### About Nursing Standard

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