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Ready, present and correct

Commercial visitor credentialing systems in the US health sector have been growing in popularity, but it's a new concept for the UK. **George Anderson**, senior category manager at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, which has recently installed one of these systems, talked to NHE about the benefits for infection control and patient safety.

Last year in America an online study – 2013 Hospital Vendor & Visitor Access Control Survey – found that 86% of hospitals and health systems have a formal vendor credentialing programme in place.

And of the 14% of respondents without one, over a third said they were likely to implement one within the next year. Comparable UK figures are not yet available, as the use of vendor credentialing systems is still something of a new phenomenon – but their use is growing.

In April, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust announced that it had become the first UK trust to implement Reptrax, a healthcare industry representative credentialing system widely used in the US to improve patient safety and infection control.

Provided by IntelliCentrics, the web-based Reptrax system enables hospitals to quickly and simply check the credentials of healthcare industry reps. It allows the hospital to monitor and enforce access policies and set specific criteria for entry to different areas of the hospital, because an average of 30 reps from 500 companies are on trust premises at any one time

'They are the experts'

George Anderson, senior category manager at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, told NHE that the need for healthcare reps to be in theatres has progressively increased, partly because products and devices grow in complexity. "If we get something that our doctors are not used to using, then you would want a product expert. To be fair to product representatives, as well as selling the products, they are the experts," said Anderson.

The new system will ensure anybody going into the theatres at Leeds is certified to the same levels as its staff. "So, particularly with regards to infection control and prevention purposes, that means everything from TB to MMR jabs are up to date," said Anderson. "More importantly, however, it will ensure that we've got people who are trained – who have attended a Theatre Access Courses, who know what they are supposed to be doing in theatre generically – and that has to put us, as a trust, in a better place. The alternative is having non-certified reps who do not understand

protocol, who, at times, inadvertently cause [problems] or breach the areas they shouldn't go into."

Initially the trust, which sees about 1.5 million patients a year at Leeds General Infirmary (LGI) and St James's University Hospital, as well as four smaller sites, has been using the system in just over a dozen of its 50-plus theatres.

So far, the credentialing system has been received positively by the vendors who, upon arrival, go online, pop in their details, and have a badge printed to say they are attending a certain theatre or visiting a certain doctor, for example.

If the visitor lacks the credentials the trust expects of someone going into its theatres, no badge is printed.

Anderson said: "We've published the credentials we require people to have when they are moving into patient-facing areas. For instance, in our theatres we use the red line system. So, if they go over the red line they need to be credentialed. If they are not crossing

the red line they can have a basic membership, which just signs them in," said Anderson. "One of the biggest reasons for using this is that I never have to check the credentials: they do that. It is not up to me, or any of our receptionists, to look at each person and their qualifications. We can override this, though, if need be."

The badge system encourages a "change in staff attitude" – they should be challenging people they do not recognise without a badge, Anderson said.

Reptrax has a mobile phone app that sends people the badge to their smartphone – like an airline boarding pass – which could also be shown to gain access to theatre.

Roll-out

Providing the early success continues, the system will first be expanded to the trust's other theatres, radiology and X-ray departments – because they have sterile procedures – and then the roll-out will go trust-wide in all patient-facing areas.

"We've got the first kiosk [the device used to input data by the healthcare reps] en route
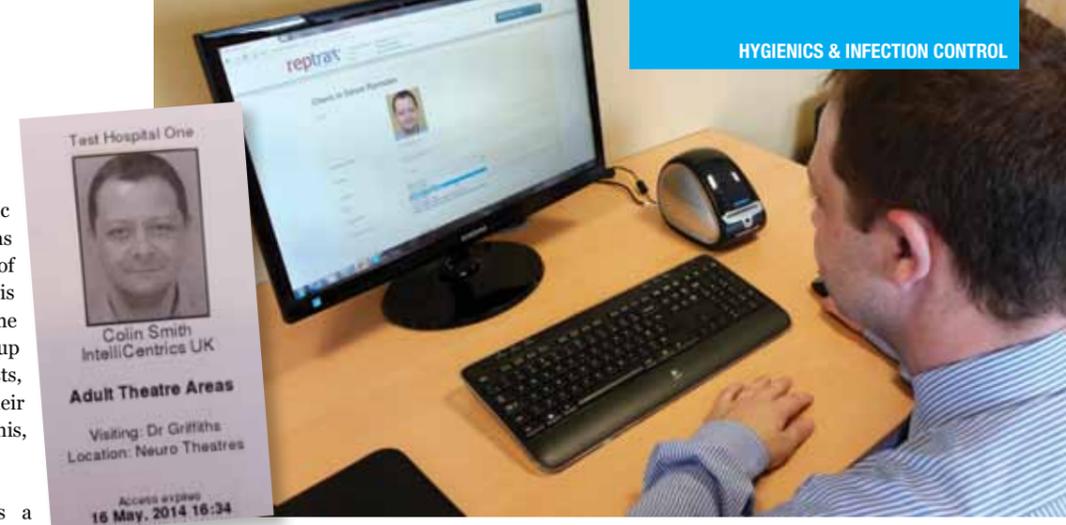
from Camax," said Anderson. "At the moment we've been putting printers into theatres because, interestingly, the kiosks have had to be designed to incorporate a printer. In the UK most kiosks do not have them and it has taken us a while to get to something that is basic, but useful. In America the kiosks produce far more printed stuff, but here we've had to do some work to adjust the models."

There will be a kiosk at every main entry point – two at LGI, but maybe more at St James'. "We are working out the best place to put them," said Anderson. "You don't want people walking miles to log in."

Azadar Shah, managing director of IntelliCentrics in the UK, said: "While as yet a little-known concept in the UK, I believe healthcare industry representative credentialing will become a widely-used technology as hospitals and other public facilities look to improve the implementation of their safety and security access policies."

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