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Media Release

RUH introduces 'washable' PC keyboards to halt spread of infections

PC keyboards which can be washed under running water are being introduced into the Royal United Hospital in Bath.

250 'infection resistant' keyboards are being put into all patient care areas as part of the hospital's multi-pronged approach to curtail the spread of harmful bacteria.

Research has shown that keyboards can have high levels of bacteria on them all the time – sometimes even more than on a toilet seat. * (see editors notes). They are also notoriously difficult to clean but bacteria levels on the wipeable keyboards are cut by 70 percent if they are cleaned every 12 hours

The new keyboards at the RUH are flat with a silicone cover, enabling them to be easily wiped down with anti bacterial wipes and sprays. They can even be immersed under a running tap. Because they have a cover, there are no nooks and crannies between the keys for food particles and bacteria to hide in.

Additionally, a warning light will illuminate, telling the computer user when the keyboard needs cleaning.

Yvonne Pritchard from the RUH's Infection Control nursing team says,

"These keyboards are a significant tool in our approach to tackling healthcare acquired infections. In clinical areas, keyboards are frequently touched by a number of staff and it has been difficult previously to keep them clean. Because the new keyboards are in a sealed enclosure, with no open spaces between keys, the whole surface can be wiped clean in seconds. The warning light will not go off until the user does clean them."

The devices were developed by microbiologists working at University College Hospital (UCH) London, who noticed that although doctors and nurses usually washed their hands between seeing patients they were often going from patient to keyboard without washing their hands. That is why they created a device that was easy to clean and which they believe will help break the cycle of infection.

See notes on next page

NOTES TO EDITORS

Photo Opportunity

RUH Director of Nursing Francesca Thompson will be displaying one of the new keyboards at the AGM on Wednesday September 24th at the Assembly Rooms in Bath at 5.30pm.

Should you wish to photograph a member of staff using one, please contact the Communications Team on 01225 825799.

Research in a London intensive care unit in 2006 found that 33% of keyboards were contaminated with MRSA : ref below

Wilson APR, Hayman S, Folan P, Ostro PT, Birkett A, Batson S, Singer M, Bellingan G. **Computer keyboards and the spread of MRSA**. Journal of Hospital Infection 2006; 62: 390-2

The keyboards are manufactured by American company Esterline and distributed by British firm Advanced Power Components. Product details attached to email.

Recent survey by "Which" magazine (May 2008) found that of 33 keyboards , 4 had high levels of bacteria, which could cause stomach upsets and diarrhoea. One keyboard was found to have 150 times the pass level of bacteria and was removed from the site as it was 5 times filthier than a toilet seat swabbed in the same investigation.

Issued by the Communications Team