



## **National Patient Safety Agency**

### **Briefing sheet**

## **Wristband specification**

### ***Developing a standardised specification for wristband design in the NHS in England and Wales (to include the possible use of coloured wristbands for identification of allergies)***

One current programme of work for the NPSA is reducing errors in the matching of patients with their care. It is being carried out through several projects, on areas such as wristband compliance, and includes analysis of information from literature, surveys of the views and experience of NHS staff, patients and the public, and analysis of data from the National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS).

Between November 2003 and July 2005 the NPSA received 236 reports to the NRLS of patient safety incidents and near misses relating to missing wristbands or wristbands with incorrect information. Mismatching patients with their care can be caused by patients not wearing a wristband or wearing a wristband that does not provide reliable and unique identifiers, and can have serious consequences.

A Safer Practice Notice (SPN) recommending action to the NHS on wristband compliance was issued by the NPSA in November 2005 and requires action by May 2006. The action is to put in place a range of recommended procedures (e.g. on getting wristbands on to patients and monitoring and review) to be included in all relevant local policies.

This second phase of work on wristband compliance includes developing a standardised specification for wristband design. The NPSA will work in consultation with the NHS, professional bodies, patients and the public, Connecting for Health and Informing Healthcare, to agree:

- a) The specification for a wristband (and whether/how it should incorporate information on allergy and other critical information as well as patient identifiers);
- b) The process of producing and providing the wristband to the patient;
- c) The process of checking with the patient (where possible) that the details are correct.

### **Background**

To promote safer patient identification and better matching of patients with the care intended for them, it was necessary to get the views of NHS staff to gain insight into what approaches are currently used in the NHS, the type of errors that occur and what changes might improve patient safety.

The following areas have been highlighted as priorities –

- To build on the SPN (Wristbands for hospital inpatients improves safety – issued November 2005) by standardising the design and information recorded on wristbands, and thereby making patient identification safer
- To provide the NHS with a specification for a standardised wristband (including if relevant the use of coloured wristbands and identification of allergies) as a SPN or other NPSA format developed through consultation with the NHS, patients, the healthcare industry and other stakeholders
- To specify agreed patient identifiers to appear on all wristbands (which will be developed through a separate but related project with the Information Standards Board for the NHS in England (with their agreement, we will work with the Welsh Assembly Government to develop something similar in Wales)
- To provide patients with a briefing and any other relevant information about the standardisation of wristband design and its importance for their safety
- To provide a standard for the healthcare industry to use in the design and production of patient wristbands
- To produce and disseminate appropriately to the NHS, patients and the healthcare industry any related papers on the wristband specification
- To explore processes currently used and recommend a standardised process for the production and provision of wristbands to patients in hospitals or other areas where they are used
- To explore current processes and recommend a standardised process for checking details with the patient when the wristband is put on the patient

### **Links with other projects**

The wristband standardisation project is closely related to other NPSA projects that will contribute to and benefit from the work:

- Blood transfusion safety
- Medication safety
- Research on processes used in bedside checking of patients and care
- Work with CfH and Informing Healthcare

### **Current status**

A detailed plan for carrying out the work on wristband compliance was agreed by the NPSA in January 2006. Work currently underway includes:

1. Establishing current wristband designs, new ideas and design and production constraints with the healthcare industry.
2. Establishing staff views with regards to what should be on a wristband, its design and any matters about design and content that would ensure staff applied and checked wristbands.
3. Consulting patients and the public to establish what is acceptable and comfortable to wear generally and for those with allergies, what should be in a specification to ensure increased compliance among patients, and the checks that are needed to be done in order to make patients feel safe.

4. Reviewing data already collected from NHS trusts on what they use to identify patients, carrying out a literature review on types of wristbands used, identifiers and processes used.
5. Carrying out a survey of trusts to establish current processes and to check key information and ideas arising from the consultations.
6. Using consultations with key players, literature review and survey as a basis to develop and test a draft SPN which includes specification, identifiers and process recommendations.
7. Issuing (once agreed with DH and WAG), a Safer Practice Notice which will develop a standardised specification for wristband design in the NHS in England and Wales (to include if relevant the use of coloured wristbands and identification of allergies).

### **Key Messages**

- The NPSA is working to devise a standardised design for wristbands in the NHS in England and Wales.
- A key focus is developing an Information Standard on patient identifiers for wristbands for the NHS, evaluating key recommendations and looking at the uptake of these within the service.
- This work will provide a basis for producing a standardised process for checking details with the patient when the wristband is produced and placed on the patient.
- This work will also allow the NPSA to identify a standardised procedure for the procurement of wristbands.

The NPSA welcomes views and comments on this project from NHS staff, professional bodies for nurses, doctors, AHPs and other healthcare professionals (to be accessed through the three NPSA professional panels), patients and the public, the healthcare industry, NHS PASA and Welsh Health Supplies.

### **Media interest**

The NPSA's SPN on wristband compliance generated quite a lot of media interest and coverage in the trade press when it was launched in November 2005. We anticipate a similar amount of interest for this second phase.

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