

NEW INITIATIVES

Blood tracking system is major advance

The blood transfusion department has been successful in winning a £158,000 grant from the NHS modernisation of pathology services programme for this leading-edge project to ensure the safe and effective use of blood in the largest acute Trust in the UK.

Current regulations require all hospitals to have systems to "track" units of blood throughout their journey from the blood bank to the patient.

This is to ensure that blood is stored correctly in accredited transfusion refrigerators in the central blood bank or satellite refrigerators in locations such as operating theatres and intensive care units.

Blood must not be out of a fridge for more than 30 minutes before transfusion. It is also essential that blood is only transfused within its "use by date" i.e. within 35 days of collection from the donor.

Current systems rely on checking and form filling by staff collecting blood from fridges and, like all manual systems, there is scope for human error and non-compliance.

'The project is a key element in the Trust's plan to use computer technology to ensure the quality and safety of the whole clinical transfusion process from vein to vein'

All 28 blood fridges on the six hospital sites in the Trust will be fitted with state of the art touch-screen computers and barcode readers designed to be as simple to use as "hole-in-the-wall" cashpoint machines.

Staff using blood fridges will identify themselves using a barcode built into their Trust security badge and units are scanned into and out of the fridge rather like a supermarket checkout.

Linked to a central computer in the blood bank, the system will know the location of every unit of blood in the Trust.

The computer can even be programmed to give verbal instructions. Users require no computer or keyboard skills to use the system and the screen prompts them through each step of the process.

Although the blood track system has already been installed successfully in a few smaller hospitals Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust is by far the largest and most complex site where the technology will operate.

The project is a key element in the Trust's plan to use computer technology to ensure the quality and safety of the whole clinical transfusion process from vein to vein. It will reduce the risk of transfusion reactions by ensuring ideal storage conditions and allow the most efficient use of freely donated blood.