

Mobile And Wireless Services For Outpatients

At A Glance

It takes a number of years before the benefits of large healthcare IT programmes become apparent. While smaller projects often have a measurable impact from an early stage, the technology is usually only accessible to a limited number of patients and health workers, and the overall impact on the healthcare provider is limited.

In the UK it will be up to ten years before the National Health Service sees the full benefits of its National Programme for IT. A number of small-scale ehealth projects, such as using mobile wireless devices to remotely monitor asthma sufferers, have had an immediate impact on a small group of patients, but these have yet to be scaled up to a level where that impact shows up in statistics on NHS performance.

However, one application of mobile technology is already having an impact on the workflow of a number of health providers – an impact that can be assessed by examining published health department statistics. SMS patient reminder systems are relatively straightforward to deploy and have been shown to reduce the number of 'Did Not Attend' in outpatient clinics where they are being used. Patient reminder systems have provided niche communications companies with an entry point into the healthcare IT market. They are also providing revenue streams for larger IT vendors and mobile operators.

Patient paging is another wireless technology that is simple to deploy. Unlike SMS patient reminders, patient paging does not have an immediate impact on a health provider's workflow. However, in the short term, it improves the patient's experience of the outpatient treatment process and reduces stress in waiting areas. Patient paging could provide the foundation for a wireless system that guides both the patient and their medical records through the outpatient treatment process.

At a time when government health departments are seeking evidence of a return on their investment in IT, attention could turn to simple applications, such as patient reminders and patient paging, which are already producing results.

This report examines the market for SMS messaging and paging in outpatient care, and attempts to measure the true impact of the technology on the healthcare provider's workflow efficiency. This report also assesses the scope for combining SMS messaging and paging systems on a mobile platform that can then be used as a gateway to electronic patient records.

SMS patient reminders provide outpatient clinics with an alternative to overbooking.

The demographic group most likely to miss appointments also contains the heaviest users of mobile phones.

At present, revenues from patient reminder and paging systems are small. However, the technology provides an entry point into healthcare IT for communications vendors.

The patient reminder and paging systems markets will merge, with both systems using the same text-messaging platform.

Communications vendors could leverage their position within the healthcare IT market by adding medication reminder and patient support functions to their services.

This report examines the impact of SMS patient reminder systems and patient paging technology on the outpatient department. It contains an estimate of the size of the UK market for these services, case studies and profiles of key vendors such as Jtech, Advanced Messaging and McKesson.