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Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust uses iAssets to optimise its hospital asset tracking system

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Andrew Stallard

Specialist Medical Engineer
Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Background:

A multi-site NHS foundation trust delivering acute healthcare services across Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a large NHS trust with around 8000 staff delivering a wide range of acute healthcare services across the Gloucestershire region. Currently involved in over 100 clinical trials and other studies ranging from testing new surgical devices to trialling new drugs, the Trust operates from two main general hospitals – Gloucestershire Royal Hospital (GRH) and Cheltenham General Hospital (CGH), a Treatment Centre at Cirencester Hospital, as well as maternity services from its Stroud Maternity Hospital.

The Medical Engineering Department supports the Trust with extensive Medical Equipment services and is part of NHS Gloucestershire Managed Services (GMS), a subsidiary company formed in 2018. GMS is wholly-owned by Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and provides a wide range of essential facilities and estates management services.

Challenge:

Monitoring and keeping track of portable medical devices within the healthcare estate

With hospital operations spread across different sites, transfer of portable medical equipment between the locations is common – making it challenging for the Medical Engineering department to monitor and keep track of devices. Well maintained and fully functioning medical equipment is vital for care delivery and to ensure the highest levels of patient safety. As assets are regularly moved between different departments, wards, or wings of the hospitals, quickly and accurately locating them for regular servicing was difficult for the team. To prevent losing or misplacing medical equipment, it was essential for the Trust to maintain an accurate asset count. As such, the Trust was looking for a solution that could empower Medical Engineering to locate, manage and utilise assets more efficiently. “While we previously had an in-house, web-based manual barcode tracking system in place, we wanted an integrated digital solution with automated functionality which doesn’t rely on human intervention to scan assets in and out,” says Steve Webb, Medical Engineering’s IT Lead and Cheltenham Manager.

Solution:

iAssets, a healthcare asset tracking system built to manage portable medical equipment

The Trust decided to implement iAssets, a healthcare asset tracking system built on proven logistics practices to intelligently manage equipment that moves within a Trust. iAssets is a part of the iFIT suite of solutions, Idox’s hospital asset tracking and records management software built around the needs of modern healthcare systems to improve safety, efficiency, and value for money.



iAssets has supported the Trust in aligning with the guidance provided by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) on management and maintenance of medical devices. So far, the Trust has around 6,000 medical devices tagged to iAssets – facilitating extensive coverage at GRH and CGH, and several peripheral buildings with 310 antennas connected back through 122 radio frequency identification (RFID) readers. According to Steve, “The Medical Engineering team is the main user of the system at present. Engineers use the tracking function to assist with locating equipment due for servicing or repair. Tracking can also be used to look back to where devices have been, in an attempt to locate where damage occurred, or where untagged accessories which have been lost might be found. Several ward and clinic administrators also use the system to keep track of their own devices. Most devices in our two Equipment Libraries are also tagged to the system, and Library technicians and ward staff use the system regularly to locate the equipment they require.”

Outcome:

Improved efficiency, cost savings, and healthcare delivery

Deploying iAssets has helped the Trust intelligently manage medical devices across the healthcare estate – making life easier for the hospital staff. “To be able to track assets quickly and efficiently has helped boost morale within the department. If we’ve got a medical device that’s due for service, for example, we can just look it up in the system and be certain where it is located. Previously, the thought of having to go and find it was quite frustrating – like finding a needle in a haystack,” tells Andrew Stallard, Specialist Medical Engineer at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. By offering multi-site coverage, iAssets helps Medical Engineering easily track assets that move between sites, often with patients – thereby eliminating a great deal of time spent unnecessarily looking for equipment. “As the software timestamps every time an asset leaves site, staff no longer need to wander the corridors trying to find a wheelchair or a transport trolley”, he adds.

By allowing access to the right equipment at the right time, iAssets has helped the Trust optimise patient care and safety. The Trust can ensure that usage and maintenance are tracked throughout the asset life cycle, from making sure devices are well maintained and serviced at the right time, to devices only used by appropriately trained staff. The panoramic view provided by iAssets promises quick delivery of vital equipment in an emergency, helping to save lives. “Using iAssets offers improved visibility of Equipment Library assets helping us make efficient use of those devices in the hospital. The software has also helped us in several other ways – from finding a missing blood pressure monitor in under 30 minutes to urgently locating a bi-level positive airway pressure (BiPAP) ventilator that was removed from a ward, and making audits quicker and easier to complete with the insight from RFID tag tracking,” Andrew explains.

Along with increasing operational efficiency and improving care delivery, iAssets has facilitated significant cost reduction in managing medical devices and hospital equipment across the healthcare estate. “The system has enabled us to identify underutilised devices – thereby helping us save substantial cost in replacements, for example, 10 such pieces of equipment have already been decommissioned. The ease of finding medical equipment quickly has also minimised our spend on hourly expenses when external contractors arrive on site to service the assets we manage,” he adds.

During the pandemic, iAssets proved to be an invaluable tool for the Trust. Key medical equipment such as ventilators, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines, nutrition pumps and respirator masks could be easily tracked and located by clinical staff – reducing delays in care delivery. According to Steve, “If the site management team called up asking for ventilator locations for example, we were able to log in, even from home when on-call, track them down and send a list within 10 minutes – extremely useful during those critical times.”

Commenting on the overall experience of collaborating with Idox, he says, “What worked for us from the beginning was the fact that iAssets is configurable, so the team at Idox could customise the solution according to our requirements. We use the Idox Ideas Hub to suggest product improvements and our suggestions are always listened to. We’ve been involved in trials and are encouraged by Idox to integrate tracking data from other platforms such as WiFi and Bluetooth tags to create a single solution.”

Looking to the future, Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust Foundation is beginning to use iAssets to track non-medical devices. This includes catering equipment, controlled-drug transportation, cleaning equipment, transport cages, IT devices and more, which they believe will be extremely beneficial for the Trust, unlocking efficiencies and further value across other departments in the hospitals and hopefully, the wider Integrated Care System for Gloucestershire.

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