

# Evidence Bites: Patient identification

An evidence summary inspired by safety discussions held at the WUTH Safety Summit

## Why is correct patient identification important?

The failure to correctly identify patients continues to result in medication errors, transfusion errors, testing errors, wrong person procedures, and the discharge of infants to the wrong families. The main areas where patient misidentification can occur include drug administration, phlebotomy, blood transfusions, and surgical interventions<sup>1</sup>.

## What are other Trusts doing?

Wristbands are widely used to identify the correct patient, though missing bands or incorrect information limit the efficacy of this system<sup>1</sup>. World Health Organization guidelines promote the use of at least two identifiers (e.g. name and birth date), encouraging patient participation, non-verbal approaches for identifying comatose or confused patients, repeated checking and review, and staff and patient education<sup>1</sup>.

A report by the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA)<sup>2</sup> identified a wide range of new technologies being used in healthcare including barcodes, radio frequency identification (RFID), card based technologies (magnetic strip, IC chip) and biometrics (e.g. fingerprint and iris scan).

[Wells Park GP Surgery](#) in south east London uses fingerprint technology.

[Birmingham Heartlands Hospital](#) uses the active radio frequency identification (RFID) tagging system to compile operating lists.

[Oxford University Hospitals](#) use a fully electronic, paperless hospital transfusion process incorporating barcode patient identification and handheld computers at the bedside to ensure the correct blood is transfused. The system saves the Trust £500,000 a year.

[Derriford Hospital](#) shows an in-house 'Correct Patient Correct Treatment' video at mandatory training for surgical directorate staff.

Examples of NHS patient identification policies can be found via this [Google advanced search](#).

## Further reading

1. [World Health Organization, Patient Safety Solutions, volume 1, solution 2, 2007](#)
2. [Right patient – right care. National Patient Safety Agency \(NPSA\) 2004](#)
3. [Standardising wristbands improves patient safety, National Patient Safety Agency](#)

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