

What are you waiting for?

Dynamic Messaging Keeps Hospital Patients Informed



The Oncology Ward at the world famous Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge, has become the first department in the hospital to embrace modern communication technology – including internet capability – to make sure its patients are provided with up-to-date and relevant information while waiting for appointments.

The new messaging system – designed and installed by Visual Planet – offers patients expected waiting time, information on cancer charities, news and weather updates as well as relaxing pictures, with an almost limitless potential for future applications. As David

Baslinton, the Oncology Department Business Manager explains, the Visual Planet system offers many advantages over their old messaging 'system'.

“We used to just have notice boards and paper posters. This can look very messy – the posters easily get scuffed and the information quickly gets out-of-date. It can also be very time consuming to produce the material and change the displays.”

David knew what the department needed – a modern system which could easily display a changing range of notices and announcements, while also presenting up-to-date information on estimated waiting times.

“We looked at a wide range of options,” continues David. “None of them seemed to even come close to offering what we wanted, while the effort needed to manage the content and keep the display fresh was almost as bad as using the old paper poster system!”

Vernon Spencer, Technical Director at Visual Planet explains how dynamic messaging overcomes this.

“The content is the most important part and it's vital to keep it fresh and relevant. Unlike other systems which use looped material on CDs meaning that the same content keeps repeating, our system uses Internet Technology to allow the content to be managed remotely and changed automatically. This also has the benefit of being able to easily show new content in different formats, for example videos or other multi-media applications.”

David explains why he is happy with the Visual Planet system, both for the range of content it displays and the ease with which it can be managed.

“The software package that came with the system for managing the content means they're as easy to put together as a PowerPoint presentation. We have several staff who have been trained to use it and because so much of the display is done automatically – it turns itself on and off at the right times and gets news feeds straight from the BBC website – it's a job that takes barely any time.”

While David has experimented with other applications, for example using the screens to play cartoons when children were visiting the ward for an open day, he is keen to increase the range of material displayed and to take full advantage of the technology.

“The main purpose of these screens is obviously to inform our patients,” continues David. “So we can show live waiting times automatically from our databases, but with a lot of patients coming here regularly and spending a fair amount of time sitting here waiting for appointments the screens should also be used as something interesting to look at. It's for this reason that in-between the bits of information we also show relaxing scenic pictures and encourage our patients to bring in their own photos of areas they like.”

With three screens in the department already, David is keen to increase the number so that every patient has access to one. It's not just the patients either, as David explains; staff from other departments frequently come to visit to see what the fuss is about.

“Other wards are looking to see if they'd like to do something similar. I'm very pleased with Visual Planet and can thoroughly recommend them to any organisation seeking an easy and visual way to keep staff and clients informed.”

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For press information, please contact:

Rachel Holdsworth/Nick Holmes, Holdsworth Associates, Holdsworth Associates

Telephone: 01954 202789

E-mail: rachel@holdsworth-associates.co.uk.