

Study: Hospital cell phone ban unnecessary

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British researchers say they have determined the "hysteria" surrounding the use of cellular telephones in many hospitals is not justified.

Although more than half of U.K. residents own mobile phones, the use of such devices is banned in most hospitals since they are considered potentially hazardous in medical environments.

But a study by the U.K.'s Medical Devices Agency says the evidence for harm is limited. The researchers determined 4 percent of medical devices suffered from electromagnetic interference from digital mobile phones at a distance of 3.2 feet. That compared with 41 percent from emergency services' handsets and 35 percent from porters' handsets.

"It is time we took a more sensible and considered approach to the use of mobile phones in hospitals," said the researchers. "The advice to patients with a permanent pacemaker who use mobile phones outside hospitals is based on evidence and is both sensible and practical -- they are advised to use the phone in the hand opposite to the site of implantation ... a similarly practical solution could be found for hospitals."

The study appears in the current issue of the *British Medical Journal*.

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