

More pediatric hospitalists using text messaging to communicate

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More pediatric hospital physicians are communicating through cell phone text messaging, rather than the traditional pager method, according to research presented Oct. 21 at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference and Exhibition in New Orleans.

Since the early 1980s, physicians traditionally have relied on pagers to contact other physicians, residents, nurses and [hospital staff](#). However, with the surge in [cellphone](#) use – and the fact that many cellphones now accept pages – many physicians and staff are [sending text messages](#) with questions and requests for assistance.

In the study, "Text Messaging as a Means of Communication among Pediatric Hospitalists," researchers administered an electronic survey to 106 pediatric [hospital physicians](#). The majority of the physicians surveyed were female (68 percent) and had been in practice less than 10 years (62 percent). Ninety percent of responders regularly used a [smartphone](#) and 96 percent used text messaging.

The most frequent method of communication in the hospital setting was verbal face-to-face communication (92 percent) and [telephone conversation](#) (92 percent). However, more than half of the physicians interviewed (57 percent) reported either sending or receiving work-related text messages, of whom 12 percent reported sending more than 10 messages per shift. Nearly half (49 percent) also reported receiving work-related text messages when not scheduled to be on call. Most often these text messages were to or from other pediatric hospitalists (59

percent), fellows or resident physicians (34 percent), or subspecialists and consulting physicians (25 percent).

Forty-one percent of [respondents](#) reportedly received text messages on a personal phone, and 18 percent to a hospital-assigned phone. Twenty-seven percent said they preferred texting for brief communications; 23 percent preferred a hospital assigned pager; and 21 percent preferred verbal face-to-face communication.

Few physicians reported that their hospital had a policy for texting or Health Insurance Portability and Protection Act (HIPPA)-encrypted software for texting.

"We are using text messaging more and more to communicate with other physicians, residents and even to transfer a patient to a different unit," said abstract author Stephanie Kuhlmann, MD. "We've had such a rapid increase in cellphone use, and I'm not sure that hospitals have caught up by putting in place related processes and protocols."

We also need to look at life balance," said Dr. Kuhlman. "It's not easy to leave your cellphone when you're not at work. People still can contact you."

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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