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NHS to Tackle Hospital Superbugs with Infrared Technology

NHS figures show that about nine per cent of patients actually acquire infections during a hospital stay. This costs the Health Service around £1billion annually – money that could be saved by something as simple as regular hand washing.

As part of the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI), the National Institute for Health Research Invention for Innovation programme has awarded a two year contract to British infrared specialist, Irisys, to develop sensors to drive improvement in compliance with hospital handwashing regulations.

Together with associated communication and reporting systems, the result will be an automatic monitoring and alerting system that will be affordable and non-intrusive. Initially designed for the NHS, the system will subsequently be applicable to all healthcare providers, and to other industries such as food processing and handling.The impact of pathogens such as MRSA and C-difficile on the NHS first came to prominence in the 1990s. Many people carry these bugs with no effect on their day-to-day health. But in a hospital environment, the situation becomes potentially life-threatening. Hand cleansing is a key way to cut infection rates. To reduce the possibility of passing infection between individuals, any person having contact with patients should wash their hands thoroughly:

-when they first enter a patient area;
-before and after touching a patient; and
-before leaving an area or moving to another patient after touching anything else.

The Irisys solution is called the Intelligent Handwashing Monitor (IHM). The system looks at the behaviour of personnel in the hospital environment so that handwashing compliance is improved in line with established procedures. The infrared system monitors movement in and out of a specific area; and the number of times each handwash unit is used. Compliance rates are then calculated, displayed locally and reported.The IHM project complements the Irisys existing programme in Assisted Living, where the company is developing infrared sensing products and systems that can help to monitor elderly and disabled people and others at risk of injury, without intruding on their privacy. It represents another significant step by Irisys into the healthcare market.

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