HEALTH NEWS

Robots set to tackle killer hospital bugs

▶ New technologies have been deployed across local hospitals to bust bugs and protect patients from hospital-acquired infections

▶ Local NHS bosses also receive £4m to help staff learn new ways to keep wards cleaner than ever

GEOFF COWART

ROBOTS have been called in to local hospitals to beat life-threatening infectious bugs thanks to a landmark new NHS scheme.

According to Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, the hospital group is one of only seven in the UK to test a range of new technologies – including a vapour decontaminating robot.

Now, hospitals such as Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's will test the effectiveness of six new technologies which have been designed to reduce levels of infection, especially MRSA bloodstream infections and C. difficile.

So what does it mean for local patients?

Anthony Sewell, Imperial Trust's project manager, said: "This means is that we are speeding up the time it takes for proven infection busters to be introduced into our hospitals.

"While our patients will be the first to benefit, the work we are doing will enable hospitals across the country to fight infections like MRSA more effectively."

The technologies – including the high-tech robot – were introduced in July at Hammersmith Hospital.

The robot-monitored vapour technology works by measuring the dimensions of a sealed room and then emitting hydrogen peroxide vapour which is proven to kill antibiotic resistant organisms such as MRSA on surfaces including monitors and ventilators.

It means that a side room and a whole ward can be decontaminated in less than two hours and less than 12 hours respectively.

The other devices and cleaning-related technologies being evaluated are: a special silver-alloy catheter, a new skin decontaminant, two bowel management systems and a new bacteria monitoring system.

Dr Alison Holmes, director of infection prevention and control for the trust, added: "While there is still much work to be done across the trust in improving patient safety and experience, we have significantly reduced our rates of infection over the last year."

The current trials for the new technology are expected to last for around six months.

MONEY TO BOOST RESEARCH

MEANWHILE, your local NHS trust has received more than £4million of funding to boost research into the prevention of hospital infections.

The funding was given to a London consortium comprising the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Imperial College London and the Health Protection Agency (HPA), with the aim of ensuring that benefits from research into infections reach patients as quickly and effectively as possible.

It will be used to fund work to identify virulent strains of MRSA so it can be quickly detected and controlled.

Another project includes finding the best ways to change the habits of hospital staff and patients to prevent infections occurring and spreading, and to improve antibiotic use in local hospitals.

The funding, provided by UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC), will allow the creation of more than 15 new posts to control the spread of infections.

Dr Holmes said: "This funding injection will boost our ability to tackle hospital infections not just at a laboratory level, but through figuring out how to make people change their habits and practices and to change the ways our hospitals are managed.

BUG OUT: New robots to make sure local hospitals are cleaner than ever says NHS boss Anthony Sewell

> **We have significantly reduced our rates of infection. We want to ensure we're not just coming up with new ideas**

"We want to ensure that we're not just coming up with new ideas, but that we're making sure they become part of practice on the wards."

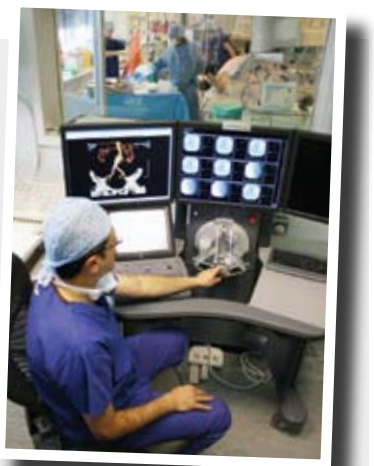
Dr Holmes added that the work would benefit both the NHS and the local population.

"The research will involve all of our hospitals, so our patients will be the first in the country to benefit from the innovation and improvements," she said.

The latest figures show that the trust is on track to reduce the number of cases of MRSA bacteraemia for 2008-9.

And in April, the trust announced it had successfully reduced MRSA bloodstream infections by 60 per cent over the last three years.

Dr Holmes added: "Latest data also shows that in June the trust was meeting and exceeding its reduction targets for the number of C.difficile cases."



ROBOTIC: Doctor performs surgery

Revolutionary heart surgery comes to town

A WORLD-FIRST in robotic surgery could herald life-saving treatment for the borough's aneurysm sufferers.

Surgeons from Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, which runs Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's hospitals, used a robot to perform the vascular surgery on a 78-year-old patient.

The procedure involved clinicians steering a robotic catheter through the patient's blood vessels to fit a stent, or tube, at the site of the aneurysm, aiding blood flow and reducing the risk of a fatal rupture.

The operation is far less invasive than open surgery, requiring a much smaller incision and leading to a faster recovery, and could enable surgeons to provide treatment for all aneurysm cases.

New hope for patients with eye disease

A BREAKTHROUGH in laser eye surgery has revolutionised treatment for local eye disease sufferers.

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, which runs Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's hospitals, is using the technology to treat conditions such as superficial corneal scarring in less than 10 minutes.

Eye patients previously faced the ordeal of corneal transplantation, a lengthy procedure associated with a greater risk of complications.

MMR jabs under 18s back by health bosses

A MEASLES vaccination plan aiming to curb the growing risk of an epidemic has been welcomed by the Health Protection Agency.

The agency's research shows that low immunisation rates have increased the risk of an outbreak of up to 100,000 cases – the majority in London.

NHS Primary Care Trusts are urging that all children under 18 get the measles, mumps & rubella (MMR) vaccine available to all children.

Doctors recorded 20 suspected cases of measles in the borough during the first half of 2008.