

The futuristic sticking plaster that saves lives... but could kill off bedside nursing

- High-tech plaster can monitor heart rate and body temperature
- Streams statistics to nurses's computers and mobiles over wi-fi network
- Nurses will receive 'beep' alerts if something is wrong by £35 device
- Experts say plasters must not be used to 'nurse by remote'

By [Stephen Adams](#)

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The humble sticking plaster used to be for little more than keeping wounds clean and dry.

But within weeks NHS patients will be 'patched up' with a futuristic version of the plaster that can monitor heart rate, breathing patterns and body temperature.

The device streams these statistics to nurses' computers and mobile phones over a wi-fi network.

Doctors say the disposable £35 patches, which send staff 'beep' alerts if they detect something wrong, will save hundreds of lives a year – and the NHS millions.



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The high-tech plaster monitors heart beat, temperature and breathing rate before streaming results to nurses over a wi-fi connection

But experts warn the technology must not be used as an excuse for 'nursing by remote'.

Research has shown that nurses sitting at their desks and not walking the wards leaves vulnerable elderly patients feeling isolated and lonely at what can be a frightening time. There are fears this kind of remote monitoring could make that situation worse.

But NHS managers are keen to test the SensiumVitals patch, which is the brainchild of British researchers and has been developed by a British company. As many as ten NHS hospitals will test them in the coming months – on busy medical wards and potentially in over-stretched A&Es.

The hope is that by picking up deteriorating patients sooner, fewer will end up dying.

Up to 6,000 hospital patients die every year because they are not monitored properly, according to a 2012 report by the Royal College of Physicians.

York Hospital anaesthetist Dr Ian Jackson, who is acting as medical adviser to Sensium Health, said: 'I think we have a game-changer here.'

'Every two minutes we get information from the patch, giving us very early indications of whether something is going wrong. There's good evidence that the earlier you identify a patient who is deteriorating, the better chance you have of rescuing them and having a positive outcome. The bottom line is that this could potentially save hundreds of lives every year.'

'It could make a huge difference.'



Alamy

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The device - which could save the NHS millions - must not be used to 'nurse by remote' critics say

Dr Jackson said 'very busy staff in very busy hospitals' would welcome the patches, because they would give them a 'degree of security' about their patients.

Anthony Sethill, chief executive of Sensium's parent company Toumaz Group, said the patches could save the NHS more than £500 million a year on a £50 million annual investment, mainly by slashing the number of days patients spent in hospital.

A six-month US study found that the patch almost halved the time patients who experienced a serious and unexpected medical episode spent in hospital.

Professor Sir John Tooke, president of the Academy of Medical Sciences, said: 'Vital-signs monitoring is something that is not done particularly well in NHS hospitals.'

'Human factors get in the way: staff get distracted or called to what they perceive to be more urgent matters. The proper application of this type of technology will be better than human measurement alone. I think it's the future – as long as the technology is robust and subject to rigorous trials.'

But Prof Tooke added: 'There's no substitute for looking at people, talking to people, and understanding how

they are feeling.

'Care and compassion has rightly been the subject of scrutiny in the NHS in recent times.'

Julie Bailey, founder of the Cure The NHS pressure group, welcomed the device. She said: 'If this could help save money and allow the frontline staff to focus on our other medical needs, then we should embrace what technology has to offer.'



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[terrydactyl](#), Ilanelli, United Kingdom, 10 hours ago

these plasters are disposable and unobtrusive for the patient,they send the medical info every 2 mins not 4 to 6 hrs.thats got to be good news,the plasters have passed the highest checks in europe with medical boards and are already been trialled in america and are now going into theyre hospitals,the company that developed this system is british,why are we always so slow to see the benefits of things like this.its not only going to save our nhs millions,but more importantly save hundreds of lives.

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[terrydactyl](#), Ilanelli, United Kingdom, 11 hours ago

these patches are light clean and disposable,no wires plugged into walls or machines and the patient is still monitored when recovered and mobile,the system has passed the highest awards by medical boards in europe,the plasters are already going into american hospitals,the company that has developed this is british ,but the americans have once again seen the benefits of this and are installing it ahead of us once again,we need to get in gear.

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[doctorintown2](#), Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 11 hours ago

This is a brilliant idea and is the best way forward. 1. As these patches are used by only one patient there will be MUCH less possibility of bugs being passed around on equipment ... and nurses -- LIVES SAVED 2. Most nurses are very busy, this will free up time to allow them to do other things. - BETTER CARE 3. These take the vital signs every 2 minutes, often vital signs are only taken every 4 or 6 hours. Many times when someone's health is deteriorating it will be noticed much earlier. - SAVING LIVES, SAVING TIME SPENT IN HOSPITAL 4. These systems will I assume also record the high value frequent data, giving doctors and consultants very good data to use for diagnosis. - BETTER CARE -- MORE MONEY SAVED 5. These can be used in busy A&Es where patients can easily be "missed" with all the trauma going on etc. 6. These can be used after hospital in say care homes, or sheltered housing. - MORE LIVES SAVED. The NHS should embrace the opportunity to lead the world with this.

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[jonithal](#), plymouth, United Kingdom, 20 hours ago

"Nursing by remote" has been going on for years!

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[GUnurses](#), London, United Kingdom, 21 hours ago

I like the idea of this.. However it must still be used alongside hourly rounds etc. I doubt this patch picks up depth/symmetry or breathing and patient colour etc. There seems to be a lot of "nurse bashing" on this articles comment page. I'm not sure why most people sound like they actually want nurses so have an isolated and depressing existance on the wards. One of the nicest feedback forms I got for the nurses on my ward stated how lovely it was that the nurses still managed to have a laugh and a joke, maintain their sanity, and a bit of banter with patients! What is so wrong with turning to your colleges for a little chat or support through a horrendously busy day! Shall we stand and lean against a wall to write our paperwork? (instead of the desk) Im sure thats against infection control to some degree. If the nursing care these people have had is so terrible then Send in a complaint and I assure you it will be dealt with by people who do care! Thats why we do our jobs!!

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[GUnurses](#), London, United Kingdom, 21 hours ago

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[Just one little cog](#), North of Watford, United Kingdom, 1 day ago

The problem with this technology is not that it means nurses wouldn't have to wheel around the monitoring equipment to do obs every hour or so it's that some managers will see it as a way to cut staffing which will mean that patients will suffer. Technology can be useful and in this case getting readings every couple of minutes will mean that changes are detected earlier BUT there has to be some safeguards in place to prevent it being used to cut staff. That is why the recommendation in the Francis report that there should be a national min number of nurses per ward should have been implemented and not just nurses on the wards but any staff group that has direct patient contact should have national minimum numbers set

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[NWME](#), Dudley, United Kingdom, 18 hours ago

But the 'plaster' doesn't do all of the observations, so someone would still have to go around and do blood pressure. Nurse staffing is already unacceptably low, so even with this device, it would be unsafe to cut levels any lower. To be honest, I don't think I'd even trust the temperature or pulse rate readings from the device either.

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[glynnpt](#), Basingstoke, United Kingdom, 1 day ago

Maybe it would free up nurses to go and talk to those patients who need the extra care, knowing that they would be notified of anyone in trouble instantly

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[Aletheia](#), Gloucester, United Kingdom, 1 day ago

Oh dear, we have a massive problem with nurses not being prepared to do the basics of regular walks around the wards to check that patients are okay because a lot of them see it as beneath themselves to be doing basic care. This will just provide them with the ability to do even less hands on work.

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[Citizen Of Earth](#), Earth, 1 day ago

Err, is it just me or does anybody else think it's not a great idea to have yet another source if RF transmissions strapped to their chest to add to the stress of mobile phones, wireless internet, TV, satellite, radio transmissions etc. already present?

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[Tommo](#), Cambridge, 22 hours ago

Citizen, it's just you. I think you meant "the stress of *worrying about* mobile phones, wireless internet..." I would seek treatment for your anxiety disorder or "electrosensitivity" if I were you. By the way the electronics in this runs for a week on a button cell, and it emits less than a milliwatt for a fraction of a second once in a while which is thousands of times less than a mobile phone or WiFi device and probably much less power than you are exposed to when writing your comment on your laptop/iPad.

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