

News story: Health and Social Care Secretary bans fax machines in NHS

NHS trusts will instead be required to invest in new technology to replace outdated systems.

The ban on buying fax machines takes effect from January 2019. They will be phased out by 31 March 2020. NHS organisations will be monitored on a quarterly basis until they declare themselves 'fax free'.

A freedom of information request revealed in July that [more than 8,000 fax machines are still being used by the NHS in England](#)

From April, NHS organisations will be required to use modern communication methods, such as secure email, to improve patient safety and cyber security.

It is part of the Health and Social Care Secretary's [tech vision](#), to modernise the health service and make it easier for NHS organisations to introduce innovative technologies.

Digital services and IT systems will soon have to meet a clear set of open standards to ensure they can talk to each other across organisational boundaries and can be continuously upgraded.

Any system that does not meet these standards will be phased out and the government will look to end contracts with providers who do not understand these principles for the health and care sector.

Richard Corbridge, Chief Digital and Information Officer at Leeds Teaching Hospital, said:

Turning off the fax is a step in the delivery of integrated care and a leap forward in putting healthcare information in the right hands every time it is needed.

We don't underestimate the enormity of the challenge to remove all our machines in such a short time frame, but we simply cannot afford to continue living in the dark ages.

The 'axe the fax' campaign aims to empower staff rather than disarm them and so far the feedback has been positive – staff are recognising that on the one hand we have hugely innovative technology being implemented in the trust and on the other we have technology that hasn't existed for decades in other industries.

Richard Kerr, Chair of the Royal College of Surgeons Commission on the Future of Surgery, said:

Earlier this year, work undertaken for the RCS's Commission on the Future of Surgery revealed that NHS hospital trusts own over 8,000 fax machines. This is absurd.

Advances in artificial intelligence, genomics and imaging for healthcare promise exciting benefits for patients. As these digital technologies begin to play a bigger part in how we deliver healthcare it is crucial that we invest in better ways of communicating the vast amount of patient information that is going to be generated.

Most other organisations scrapped fax machines in the early 2000s and it is high time the NHS caught up. The RCS supports the ban on fax machines that will come into place in March 2020.

Since we published our data on NHS fax machines, we've seen a number of trusts pledge to 'axe the fax'. They have proved that, with the right will and support, it is possible to modernise NHS communications.