

# Electronic prescribing in NHS hospitals patchy at best

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(Medical Xpress)—Patchy use of electronic prescribing in NHS hospitals – and the huge diversity of systems - creates huge challenges for both patient safety and staff training, according to a new study published today in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

Of 101 hospitals in England that took part in a survey about their current use of electronic prescribing, just one has a system that is used in all clinical areas (including outpatients) with a further 12 hospitals using electronic prescribing in all adult [medical](#) and surgical wards.

Overall, 69% of the 101 hospitals in the study had some form of electronic prescribing in place. However, there is wide variation in the systems used – in many hospitals electronic prescribing is only in place in certain clinical areas or for limited prescribing.

For the first time, the authors of the study were also able to describe the use of multiple electronic prescribing systems within individual hospitals. For example, a number of hospitals had a system for prescribing inpatient medication plus separate systems for prescribing medication to take home and/or for cancer chemotherapy.

More than half of hospitals with electronic prescribing had more than one system, representing 60 different systems in total. Some were commercially available systems, whilst others were "home-grown".

Professor Bryony Franklin, one of the research team from UCL School of Pharmacy, said: "Within the UK, most prescribing by GPs is done using a computer. In stark contrast to many other developed countries, prescribing for [hospital inpatients](#) is generally based on pen and paper."

She added: "The level of variation in the use of electronic prescribing between hospital departments, and the diversity of the systems in place, presents a potential threat to [patient safety](#) in the form of medication errors."

The UK government is encouraging the adoption of [electronic prescribing](#) in hospitals as it is believed that this will increase efficiency and reduce patient harm due to medication errors.

**More information:** "The Use and Functionality of Electronic Prescribing Systems in English Acute NHS Trusts: A Cross-Sectional Survey," Zamzam Ahmed, Monsey Chan McLeod, Nick Barber, Ann Jacklin, Bryony Dean Franklin. Published: Nov 20, 2013. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0080378](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0080378)

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