

Breeding ground for bacteria?

By *Bernie Monegain, Editor* | 11/01/07 |

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MENLO PARK, CA – Physicians' fear of infection is on the rise, spurred by the increasing use of mobile technology at the bedside, according to a new study by Spyglass Consulting Group.

Healthcare Without Bounds: Point of Care Computing for Physicians discusses existing workflow inefficiencies in accessing clinical information, current usage models for computing devices and solutions, and barriers for widespread adoption.

Of the 100 physicians interviewed by Spyglass, 65 said they were worried about the threat of infection from the use of computing devices at the point of care.

When Spyglass conducted a similar study in January 2005, 25 percent of the 102 physicians interviewed said they were concerned about the infection risks associated with mobile technology.

Spyglass founder and managing director Gregg Malkary figures the increased concern is directly related to the increased use of devices.

Steven J. Davidson, MD, chairman of emergency medicine at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, N.Y. , says hand washing is the key to preventing infection.

"I do think that mobile devices may serve as fomites (carriers of infectious organisms) and that in general these devices are not easily cleaned," Davidson said. "It is a reasonable concern to recognize this and hence with that awareness for clinicians who use mobile devices to understand that they must disinfect their hands before and after using their personal mobile devices."

He said Maimonides does not have a policy regarding the maintenance of personal mobile devices because the organization does not envision personal mobile devices being used in patient care.

As for keyboards, they are cleaned regularly, he said.

"I watched several on one counter being done in my ED just yesterday morning."

"Anecdotally," says Malkary, **"many organizations don't have policies. Nobody wants to take responsibility for cleaning these devices."**

Add to this the new Medicare rules that would withhold payments to hospitals for the costs of treating certain "conditions that could reasonably have been prevented," and the concern over infections rise.

Spyglass conducted the telephone interviews over a four-month period beginning in April.