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Clinic Installs Antimicrobial Copper Surfaces in New Patient Safety Initiative

A new patient safety initiative led by an Ear, Nose and Throat Consultant at Lincolnshire's Pilgrim Hospital is harnessing the inherent antimicrobial efficacy of copper to help address the growing problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in hospitals.

Michael Oko – ENT Consultant and Clinical Lead, and Department of Health Advisor on Obstructive Sleep Apnoea – has championed the replacement of key high-touch surfaces with antimicrobial copper equivalents, beginning with bed rails, cabinet handles, chair arms, grab rails, hand rails, light switches, taps and coat hooks. With these now installed, his intention is to replace more items and roll out the copper upgrade throughout the hospital.

Copper is inherently antimicrobial, and shares this benefit with many copper alloys including brass and bronze. Collectively termed 'antimicrobial copper', this family of metals is used to make touch surfaces that will not harbour pathogens that cause infections, actively killing them 24/7 and in-between regular cleans. Antimicrobial copper has proven efficacy against a broad range of pathogens, including those with antibiotic resistance such as MRSA and VRE.

'Replacing the surfaces most often touched by staff, patients and visitors with antimicrobial copper equivalents will help reduce the risk of infections spreading via these surfaces,' Mr Oko says. 'It can be used as an adjunct to other infection control measures – such as regular hand washing and surface cleaning and disinfecting – to improve patient safety.'

'Reducing the rate of infections means a substantial reduction in a patient's length of stay, a reduction in their mortality risk and a reduction in overall treatment costs. Antimicrobial copper surfaces make sense from a patient safety point of view as well as a financial one.'

Antimicrobial copper has been tested in clinical trials around the world – representing a range of healthcare environments and ward types – and is included as an emerging technology in the latest National Evidence-Based Guidelines for Preventing Healthcare-Associated Infections in NHS Hospitals, with studies showing >80% less contamination on copper surfaces than non-copper equivalents. Results from a US clinical trial, funded by the Department of Defense, further observed a 58% reduction in intensive care unit patients' risk of acquiring a healthcare-associated infection when just six key touch surfaces in their rooms were replaced with antimicrobial copper items.

'In any clinical environment, certain surfaces will be touched maybe hundreds of times, by dozens of people, every day,' explains Andrew Cross of ACT Surfaces, who is working on the Pilgrim project. 'These are the key touch surfaces to identify as they will offer the most benefit when replaced with antimicrobial copper equivalents.'

'Part of the service ACT Surfaces offers is working with the hospital infection control team to identify those 'problem' touch surfaces in a given facility which, when upgraded to antimicrobial copper, will reduce the infection risk to patients and yield the best clinical savings.'

'Payback or return on investment will be quickest when items are upgraded to copper during new-build, or scheduled refurbishment or renovation, but with The Bostonian, the solid scientific and clinical evidence of efficacy and cost-effectiveness is so compelling that the client felt they had to act immediately.'



Mr Oko was keen to source the new products locally, and so ACT Surfaces invited Norwich-based company Brass Age to supply their VETOBAC antimicrobial copper range for the project. Funds are now being raised for the next phase of copper upgrades.

Antimicrobial copper products are available in a variety of colours from companies around the world, and they are listed in an online product directory at www.antimicrobialcopper.org.



Antimicrobial copper items installed at The Bostonian. Images courtesy of ACT Surfaces.

Editor’s Notes

The fundraising site for the Pilgrim project is online at justgiving.com/yimby/copperisemyhospital.

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