

Hospital staff don head cameras to beat the thugs

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VIOLENT thugs who attack or abuse Derriford Hospital staff will be filmed in the act from today.

In a world first, hospital security guards are now patrolling the site's wards, concourses, public areas and car parks wearing mini-cameras which will record incidents of verbal or physical abuse against staff.

The technology has been introduced to crack down on persistent levels of physical violence at Derriford – which includes punching, kicking, pushing, spitting, biting and butting. Official Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust figures for 2007/08 show a total of 183 reports of physical abuse on staff were made at Derriford Hospital and the Royal Eye Infirmary.



Andrew Davies, head of environmental services at Derriford Hospital, said the £10,000 investment in the technology sends a very positive message to staff. The 'head cameras', which will be worn on the shoulder, provide evidence which can be used to support victims in court. He said: "We have issues of violence against staff and the problem is not going away. "The levels of violence are still there and we do have a number of staff who are very fearful. It is all about trying to further protect them. "As far as we are aware we are the first hospital in the world to invest in this technology. We are very proud of that. "We have been putting together a security strategy for the next 10 years looking at equipment and training, and this is the next step for us."

The technology, distributed by Plympton-based Audax Business Consultancy Ltd, will be shoulder-mounted on the security guards. It will be used alongside existing security measures already in place at Derriford Hospital.

The hospital already has 120 CCTV cameras and more than 400 doors with access control. But as Mr Davies explained, the head camera technology will help to stamp out violence and make staff feel more safe. "The CCTV camera and doors are fairly static security measures," Mr Davies added. "This technology takes it on a level. "The technology is there as a level of evidence which will help corroborate people's stories. "It helps to paint both sides of the story. "The security guards will record incidents, download them and hand them to Devon and Cornwall Police. "It will also help the police because it will cut down on man hours." Mr Davies said that in the past staff had been fearful of attending court to give evidence against an attacker, or indeed giving statements to police. But he said this technology could help that issue.

Derriford Hospital's eight Securi-Guard Ltd security guards will record incidents as they arise on the cameras. They will continue to patrol internal and external areas of the Derriford site including wards, public areas, concourses, and car parks on a 24-hour-a-day seven-days-a-week basis.

Viv Gale, security advisor for Plymouth Health Community, described the technology as being an "added weapon" to aid staff and security guards. "They [his security guards] don't have handcuffs or truncheons – they are not the police," he said. "They see the technology as being an added weapon. It is an added tool helping to protect themselves and their staff. "The safety of our staff is of paramount importance to us and we will not tolerate our staff being abused, verbally or physically, by patients or visitors and we will seek prosecutions if necessary. "The cameras will play a significant role in this, as the evidence we gather from an incident can be used to take the offender or offenders to court."

Dr Alex Mayor, Medical Director for Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust, added: "Any measure which helps to safeguard staff, patients and visitors is welcomed by the Trust Board. The new

head cameras will further enhance the excellent service our security team are able to provide and we hope to see a reduction of verbal and physical abuse within the organisation."

Adam Liardet, managing director of Audax, said: "We were at the cutting edge of technology with the police and now we are doing the same with the NHS.

"The NHS and its A&E staff in particular work very hard but they are on the rough end of it.

"At last someone is taking the matter seriously.

"It is the first head camera system in the world being used in a hospital."

He added: "I am convinced that other hospitals, who have a duty of care, will follow suit."

In 2006 Plymouth led the way with the use of head-mounted cameras