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Guidance on handling donations and loans of medical equipment to hospitals in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

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This guidance is correct at the time of publishing.

However, as it is subject to updates, please use the hyperlinks to confirm the information you are disseminating to the public is accurate.

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1. Background

The NHS is receiving offers of equipment from various organisations and individuals to help with its response to the COVID19 pandemic. Some of these are spontaneous donations or loans; others are in response to specific calls for equipment.

As a result of such calls, and of other acts of generosity, hospitals may receive offers of equipment directly from sources such as, individuals, companies and charities in their local or regional area.

2. Purpose

This guidance supports hospitals in assessing, accepting and processing medical device donations and loans, to:

- ensure patient safety
- support the efficient, appropriate and timely use of hospital resources
- address issues arising as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will inform:

- hospital chief executives
- medical directors
- clinical engineering departments
- those receiving offers of medical equipment donations.

3. Scope

This guidance:

- identifies criteria to be met before hospitals accept offers of medical equipment donations or loans and
- sets out actions to be followed by clinical engineering services in response to offers of medical equipment donations and loans.

All hospitals should have procedures in place for managing medical devices which include processes covering the donation and loan of medical equipment. Medical device procedures are usually implemented by a Clinical Engineering or Electrical and Biomedical Engineering (EBME) service, provided either by the hospital or by external suppliers.

Where NHS organisations wish to redirect donations or offer some of their own equipment to other organisations, they should ask clinical engineers to provide advice on the suitability of that equipment for the proposed recipient organisation.

4. General criteria to be met before making a decision to accept medical equipment donations or loans

When hospitals receive an offer of medical equipment from elsewhere in the NHS, or from companies, charities or the public, they need consult with their clinical engineering service before accepting the equipment. This applies whether that offer is a donation or a loan.

Clinical engineers, in collaboration with their clinical colleagues, will be responsible for assessing the suitability of such equipment for use in the NHS to ensure it is safe and clinically effective.

Equipment will only be suitable for use in the NHS if it meets at least the following requirements:

- Is constructed to relevant medical device standards. This provides assurance that the equipment is safe and performs as originally specified. Older equipment may not meet current safety and performance standards and its suitability needs to be assessed carefully.
- Can be effectively cleaned and decontaminated and infection control advice should be sought.
- The receiving organisation has the resources to fully inspect and service the item and ensure it passes electrical safety and manufacturer-specified performance tests.
- It will provide a clinical function valuable enough to justify the time and cost spent in bringing the equipment into clinical service. A detailed service history will also help the organisation to judge the future useful life of the equipment.
- Staff in the receiving organisation have been, or can be, trained in its safe and effective use.

5. Actions to take before accepting a donated or loaned item

Hospital clinical engineers should therefore:

- Consult with clinicians who will be involved in using the equipment to decide whether it can be put to practical use, that trained staff will be available to use it, and to check that any auxiliary equipment/consumables necessary for its intended function are included in the donation or can be obtained.
- Check that equipment offered for donation or loan that was already in use before the COVID-19 outbreak has been constructed to relevant medical device standards and has a valid Electrical Certification (EC) Declaration of Conformity (CE mark). Newly-developed equipment offered during the outbreak must either be CE marked as a medical device or have been granted exemption from the medical device regulations by the MHRA under relevant derogation powers.^{1*} Suspect medical devices^{2**} should be reported to the MHRA.
- Ensure equipment offered for donation or loan is complete and in a satisfactory condition for clinical use. This will include looking at up-to-date service records and may include physical inspection and basic testing.

¹ www.gov.uk/guidance/exemptions-from-devices-regulations-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak

² Suspect medical devices include counterfeits or items where manufacturers make false claims that devices which are not CE marked or exempt can be used for medical purposes. Where clinical engineers encounter a suspect device they should report details to the MHRA at www.gov.uk/report-problem-medicine-medical-device and alert their hospital's medical director.

- Plan how to fully and adequately decontaminate^{3****} and refurbish the equipment, and ensure the continued availability of associated spares and consumables. This may include arranging the training of technical staff in equipment-specific support and maintenance procedures. It may also require advice from infection control specialists.^{4****}.

Hospital management will need to:

- assign the inspection and refurbishment of donated and loaned equipment a suitable priority alongside other exceptional demands being made on clinical engineering resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. This means it may not be feasible to accept donations that would in normal times be welcomed, or delaying the receipt of donations until a time when there is sufficient capacity to accept them.
- Consider the alternative of diverting donated or loaned equipment to an organisation that is able to make use of them during the pandemic.

³ Manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and decontamination should be followed, to avoid damaging equipment. Ideally, donated equipment should come with full documentation including decontamination instructions. Alternatively, if the same equipment is already in use in the NHS organisation, the documentation for this in use equipment can be used. Otherwise the manufacturer should be contacted for assistance. If there are any concerns that a manufacturer's recommendations are not appropriate or feasible, the NHS organisation's infection prevention lead and decontamination manager must be consulted for advice.

⁴ Due to the nature of its use, ventilation equipment may become internally contaminated and require extensive cleaning and decontamination. Assumptions cannot be made regarding the diligence of previous owners in following manufacturer's precautionary instructions (the use of filters, etc.) or remedial instructions (decontamination measures, etc) to avoid equipment contamination. For reasons of patient safety, therefore, the receiving organisation must presume that such equipment is internally contaminated and undertake a rigorous decontamination process which complies with manufacturer recommendations. Ventilators received from veterinary sources that have been used for farm/zoo animals may present a higher risk of pathogenic spore forming bacteria being present and for all animal species there is a risk of parasites, so decontamination needs to be effective against and take account of both these risks.

6. Actions to take once a donation or loan is accepted

Clinical engineering services will need to:

- For items on loan, agree how the equipment will be managed and returned to the owner, including how to handle any existing service contracts and equipment service records.
- Make arrangements to decontaminate and pack up equipment and any accessories securely.
- Agree collection and transport arrangements with the supplier;
- Accept items into the hospital using existing acceptance procedures and
- Make arrangements for ongoing technical support and training.

For items new to the organisation, hospital management will also need to:

- set up arrangements for the supply of any necessary consumables
- ensure staff are trained in the clinical use of the equipment

7. Contact

Please direct any enquiries about this guidance to:

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Access to professional clinical engineering advice and support can be obtained from the Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (IPEM) at: Office@ipem.ac.uk

