

WiFi SPARK parent company acquires Hospedia with plan to transform bedside terminals

Leading Wi-Fi and entertainment provider to shift business model for terminals away from 'patient pays'. 'Free at the point of use' model will include free SPARK Media entertainment for patients and additional upgrade could enable trust IT system access for clinicians

Wi-Fi and entertainment provider WiFi SPARK is to take over the management of Hospedia, which supplies bedside terminals to 75% of the UK's acute hospitals.

The company wants to change the business model for funding the terminals that were initially rolled-out in the early 2000s to replace TV sets on ward trolleys and pay phones in hospital corridors.

Instead of asking patients to pay high charges for entertainment and calls, it will offer the option to install new software on the terminals so patients can access its SPARK Media entertainment package for free, which is currently only available on patients' own devices. An additional upgrade would enable staff to use the terminals to access trust IT systems.

The cost would be met by NHS trusts and health boards and their charities, instead of asking the patients to pay for entertainment. Patients would still be able to use the units to pay for additional movie services on the upgraded terminals, if they wish to.

Matt O'Donovan, founder and chief executive of WiFi SPARK, believes the changes will be welcomed. "This provision will benefit trusts the most, because the bedside terminals will become a proper asset, providing benefits both for patients and clinicians," he said.

"For patients to be able to watch TV and to have access to other entertainment options on these units, free of charge, will be a real boost to their morale and recovery. And for hospital staff, being able to use them for clinical purposes will make the fulfillment of tasks easier."

The shift in the business model is possible because Volaris Group, parent company of WiFi SPARK, has acquired Hospedia. WiFi SPARK will take over the management of the company and oversee the transformation of around 56,500 bedside terminals at 160 hospitals, which is expected to take around three years.

There will be a phased roll-out of the new operational model, with trusts and health boards participating in the transition according to their funding programme.

Trusts can opt to stick with the current 'patient pays' model. But WiFi SPARK estimates that for most trusts a payment of less than £1 per bed per day would cover the cost of a free at the point of use service, based on the installed Hospedia terminals.

Although it would incur an additional capital cost, the company hopes trusts and health boards will want to upgrade for a better patient experience and clinical access.

The free at the point of use offer would be delivered through the SPARK Media platform, which includes TV, radio, films, games, hospital radio, newspapers and magazines, outbound calls and enables trusts to add their own packages of therapy videos, leaflets, meal ordering and patient information.

Using the terminals to access trust IT systems would make it easier for staff to use electronic systems at the bedside, without having to find a computer on wheels or return to a ward station to make up notes and orders. By leveraging existing infrastructure, trusts can ensure that not only is entertainment accessible for everyone with or without their own personal device, but that it can be transformed to better suit staff and encourage digital maturity in the most effective way possible.

“The units will become the iPhone of healthcare,” said O’Donovan. “They will give patients a unified experience to engage and entertain them, while linking patients and clinicians to the patient record in real-time, at the bedside. The SPARK Media platform will support third party applications, enabling the most up-to-date experience for patients and clinicians alike. This will be transformative for the NHS.”

Hospedia acquired Patientline UK in 2008. Patientline was one of three companies to be awarded a national licence to provide bedside entertainment and communications systems (BECS) through the government’s Patient Power Initiative in 2000.

This mandated that all major NHS hospitals should provide personal BECS for patients by 2004. Trusts and health boards did not have to pay for the bedside units under the original contracts with Patientline, but patients paid to use them.

“The concept of patients paying to watch TV in hospital seems unfair,” said O’Donovan. “We are turning this model around to provide a better system with more options for them and which also gives a practical use for clinical staff.”

WiFi SPARK is a leading provider of commercial Wi-Fi and media services to the healthcare, retail, transport, sport and exhibition space sectors. The company already works with nearly 300 hospitals across more than 80 NHS trusts and health boards in the UK. It provides 24/7 support to customers.

Ends

Notes for editors

About: WiFi SPARK

WiFi SPARK is the main provider of WiFi and media services to the NHS in the UK. The company has developed SPARK® Media, which delivers free entertainment to patients and staff, as well as dementia support services, healthcare videos, electronic meal ordering and more.

WiFi SPARK works closely with companies such as NHSX and other organisations to create a platform to increase efficiencies, to innovate and support to the NHS and its patients.

The vision since this acquisition is to ensure that no patient pays for entertainment by 2024.