Mobile phone restrictions outdated

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MOBILE phone restrictions in hospitals were outdated and unnecessary, new research has revealed. The study results, indicates that while mobile phone radiation can interfere with medical equipment, it is not nearly as common as expected.

Research undertaken by University of Melbourne's Dr Nathan Lawrentschuk and published in The Medical Journal of Australia, has found many of the current restrictions were implemented before the new digital mobile technology.

In light of the research, hospitals should instead create mobile phone-friendly zones, rather than having patients and relatives huddled outside as they do now, Dr Lawrentschuk said.

He examined a series of studies conducted between 1966 and 2004 on the affect of electromagnetic interference (EMI) on medical equipment.

The studies he examined had to include testing phones on medical equipment used to monitor or treat patients, but not implantable medical devices.

"In the largest studies, the prevalence of clinically relevant EMI was low," he said.
"Most clinically relevant EMI occurred when mobile phones were used within one metre of medical equipment."

Dr Lawrentschuk said his research showed that around four per cent of devices tested in any study were susceptible to interference.

"All studies recommended some type of restriction of mobile phone use in hospitals, with use greater than one metre from equipment and restrictions in clinical areas being the most common," he said.

Dr Lawrentschuk is a Urology research fellow at the Department of Surgery and Urology at the University of Melbourne, and at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg, Victoria.

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