

ICON - the secure and integrated payment system for NHS trusts

## Income collection made easy across the NHS



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### The challenge

As NHS hospitals continue to write off millions of pounds lost income every year, University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust is pioneering a new payment system for the NHS, which helps trusts recover more of the money they are owed and gives NHS finance professionals greater financial oversight and control.

### The solution

In partnering with NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS) to become the first NHS trust to pilot the new ICON (Income Collection Online) system, the finance team at University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust was quick to spot the far-reaching benefits the technology promises for the entire NHS. The answer to an income recovery problem that has continued to frustrate NHS hospitals all around the country.

Huw Rees, the Trust’s Financial Controller, explained: *“This is something those working in NHS finance have wanted for a long time. People are now very used to making a range of flexible payments in other areas of their lives, so the question has been – certainly in recent years – ‘why can’t we do it in the NHS?’”*

Step forward ICON. A secure and integrated way for NHS hospitals to take debit or credit card payments, in person, online or over the telephone. Linked directly to a trust’s finance platform, the user-friendly technology offers greater flexibility around how and when payments can be made, whilst also ensuring that accounting and reporting processes are more timely and accurate.

Huw said: *“It’s a bit of a no-brainer. Why wouldn’t you want to be able to increase the number of payments you’re able to accept and the flexibility with which you can take them?”*

### Key benefits

- Greater onsite payment capacity enabling more payments at the point of sale
- Increased flexibility for patients/customers around when and how they pay
- Reduced exposure to bad debt
- Increased cash flow into the trust
- Reduced operating costs through modern systems and processes
- Timely and accurate accounting and reporting

*“It has just been about somebody taking the lead and supplying the right technology – thankfully NHS SBS has taken this on.”*

And with the government now expecting the NHS to recover up to £500 million a year owed by overseas patients – five times as much as in previous years – the timely arrival of ICON, which was developed for the NHS in partnership with IT specialists Civica, provides hospitals with a simple and efficient means of maximising income.

In common with NHS trusts around the country, University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust has found it extremely difficult to locate chargeable overseas patients after they have been discharged. So, if payment is not made by a non-UK resident whilst still in hospital, then that income has, in most cases, been lost forever.

Huw explained: *“An example of this in Southampton might be an overseas visitor coming in on a cruise ship and needing to visit hospital for a minor illness or injury. The patient may come in to hospital on an evening, receive the care they need and be discharged within a few hours. Cashiers can take*

payments between 9am and 5pm but anything outside of this is potentially lost.

*“ICON will provide us with the facility to take a tablet to the patient – rather than asking them to visit the cashier’s office – for a quick and easy card payment. It’s not limited to office hours. We’re a 24/7 hospital and this technology means anybody who is appropriately authorised can take a payment at any time.*

*“This area alone will bring a significant amount of cash into the NHS that – up until now – we haven’t been able to recover.”*

## The result

The pilot at University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust began in the cashier’s office in Southampton General Hospital, and, as Simon Wood, the Trust’s Head of Financial Accounts, explained, led to immediate efficiencies when it came to taking phone payments.

“Previously our cashiers had to take down details on the phone, then physically go to a card machine, before returning to give a manual receipt number. Now anyone in the cashier’s office can take a payment on their PC and email a receipt to the patient there and then.

“Our credit control team can now also take payments easily, whereas previously they would have had to transfer the call to the cashier’s office. The process is now far quicker and easier for the person making a payment.

“Staff have found the system to be very intuitive and really easy to use. More than one person can use it at the same time, which is also a real benefit.

“The next step will see patients being able to make payments on portable tablets and then we’ll be introducing functionality that will enable secure payments via the Trust’s website.”

And it is not just overseas or private patient income where ICON has the potential to add real value. Other payments such as nursery fees, salary overpayments and training courses can all be made using the new technology.

Huw said: “Where we see a big change in the future is using the system for things like salary overpayments. If that happens today then our employee needs to go through somebody sitting at a desk in the Trust. In future, they will be able to manage their repayments online without needing to involve anyone else.

*“Ultimately this is about making it much easier for somebody to make a payment regardless of what it is for. We’re often told that somebody has attempted to make a payment but couldn’t make contact to do so. ICON eliminates this as an issue and gives people the option to pay in a manner and at a time that is most convenient to them.*

*“I have no doubt this technology will lead to a huge increase in the amount of money that is recovered across the whole NHS in future.”*

ICON is one of a range of innovative products and services that provide targeted expertise to NHS organisations in key strategic areas, such as recruitment, workforce, VAT, debt recovery and procurement.

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To find out more visit [www.sbs.nhs.uk/transforming-shared-services-plus](http://www.sbs.nhs.uk/transforming-shared-services-plus)

To hear how your NHS organisation could also benefit from partnering with NHS Shared Business Services, contact us at [sbs-w.corporatemarketing@nhs.net](mailto:sbs-w.corporatemarketing@nhs.net).



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