

Advice for Patients and their visitors on the use of Virtual Personal Assistant technology

Virtual assistants are interactive Artificial Intelligence programs either running from a PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone, or via a dedicated device. The microphone for virtual assistants is always switched on so it can pick up voice commands, and data can be stored indefinitely on external servers, which can be anywhere in the world. Virtual assistants include the following, and many more:

- Amazon Alexa
- Amazon Dot
- Amazon Echo
- Apple Siri
- Google Assistant
- Microsoft Cortana



Since the microphone is always switched on, it may potentially overhear confidential conversations between healthcare staff, patients and visitors. It is not possible to know where that information is stored, how it could be accessed, or by whom. This technology therefore represents a threat to confidentiality in the hospital.

With this in mind, we prohibit the use of virtual assistant technology in the hospital, and will disconnect any that is found. We appreciate that this technology offers great potential but regret that it is not yet ready for hospital use.

