

# WHITEPAPER

## Seven Big Problems With Using Pagers in Healthcare





Pagers have many faults, not least is their inefficiency which costs the average hospitals [\\$1.75 M per year](#) in inefficient communications and can impede critical clinical workflows. We have identified seven main issues that we see as clearly demonstrating the unreliability and inefficiency underlying pagers and holding healthcare innovation back.

### **Pagers are not encrypted**

Most doctors don't realize that pagers do not provide encrypted communications. Without encrypted communications, HIPAA compliant messaging is extremely difficult in a healthcare setting. Communications on pagers must be extremely limited and non-descriptive if doctors are to use them and not violate HIPAA regulations.

To ensure all doctor to hospital communications meet HIPAA requirements, digital exchanges must:

- Require a sign-in process
- Have encrypted messaging
- Have delivery and read receipts
- Have date and time stamps on messages
- Enable customized messaging retention and remote wipe capabilities
- Use only a specified contact list



Pagers might have one or two of these abilities but none have all six of these requirements. There's a significant cost to not using HIPAA compliant communications as was underlined in the case of Catholic Health Care Services which was fined [\\$650K for failing to have patient information encrypted and password-protected.](#)

### **Pagers can be hacked**

In an upcoming study, OnPage will detail how a U.S. hospital had their pager communication hacked and read by outside parties. As a result of this hack:

- The hospital had to register the violation with the Department of Health and Human Services
- The hospital had to inform *all* parties who had their information exposed
- The hospital had to invest in a new technology to ensure HIPAA compliance

### **Pagers have only high priority pages**

Pagers typically don't have low versus high priority messaging. In a world where all you have is a hammer, every page looks like a nail. So rather than differentiating between a prescription refill and an admission to the hospital, all pages sound alike and the difference between these two circumstances is not audible.



## Pagers have limited range

Outside of the few square blocks neighboring a hospital, a pager often won't receive its intended page. So, if a doctor or nurse is at home or taking care of business away from the hospital, they may not hear their pages. It doesn't take much imagination to realize that there is an important patient impact here from healthcare providers not getting their messages.

Furthermore, there is [limited investment](#) today in the radio towers which pagers rely upon. The maintenance of the pager infrastructure is decreasing. As such, the ability of pagers to continue to provide support of physicians' needs is decreasing.

Additionally, pagers are unable to continue to alert the physician if the page is not immediately picked up. There is no way for the paging facility to know if the page has been received. As a result, physicians frequently report that they have missed alerts. According to [Emory University](#), users report **missing pages** on pagers 97% more often than they report missing pages on cell phones and smart phones.



## **Pagers don't enable two-way communication**

Imagine you had a one-way telephone where you could only make calls but not receive them. If you have this image firmly planted in your mind, then you have a concept of the traditional pager which can only receive pages but not initiate or further communication. In hospitals in general, [text messaging is not allowed](#).

## **Pagers cannot escalate alerts**

As noted above, not all pages are created equal. But for pages that are critical, there is frequently the need to bring in expertise or assistance of other professionals. Traditional pagers don't permit this level of communication to occur. Instead, healthcare workers need to rely on their smartphone to make calls as their pagers do not allow this level of communication.

Furthermore, if the physician who is alerted is unable to answer the page, traditional pagers don't enable escalation of the alert to the next person on call.



## **Pagers don't allow attachments**

Successful healthcare diagnoses and effective treatments typically require test results and imaging. However, traditional pagers are incapable of facilitating this necessary level of communication. Instead, you are left with what you see on the screen of your pager. And that information, my friend, is not much.

These reasons only begin to tell the story of the inadequacies of pagers. They don't even address the cost to patients and their families of wasted time in getting care to the individual in need. *So caveat emptor.* Beware of that low-cost pager. While it might be low cost at first, it's long term costs are significant.

For information on how to provide secure messaging and alerting to your facility:

Visit the OnPage website at <https://www.OnPage.com> or call us at 781-916-0040.