GPS-equipped Smartphones to Track Disease Spread

As the UK's intensive care departments struggle to deal with the number of people admitted with the flu, scientists are testing how global positioning systems (GPS) in mobile phones can be used to track how people spread infectious diseases. Professor Bill Buchanan, Institute of Informatics and Digital Innovation at Edinburgh Napier University, UK, is working in conjunction with Imperial College London.

Similar techniques have already been used to track sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) but airborne infections like flu are harder to monitor.

Buchanan believes that accurate GPS location readings of less than 10 metres can indicate how quickly a flu pandemic might occur by monitoring patient contact with others and alerting medical staff to immunise those most likely to contract an infection earlier.

"Such a system would allow emergency health providers to prioritise who may have come into contact with an individual exposed to a serious airborne illness, such as influenza during an outbreak," he said in a statement. "Another application might be to trace the source of an infection in a close environment, such as a hospital."

Researchers in France have previously suggested that GPS can help measure the severity of peripheral artery disease (PAD) in sufferers by measuring how far they walk, and the technology has also been harnessed in tracking devices designed to locate disorientated Alzheimer's patients.

https://www.gim-international.com/content/news/gps-equipped-smartphones-to-track-disease-spread