

Importance of Barcoding on Unit-of-Use

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Use of automation in our hospital supply chain is widespread, from the receiving dock all the way to the patient.

This automation is dependent on a readable bar code on the unit of use or the unit of issue. A readable barcode has become fundamental to the efficiency of our operations, the traceability of the supplier's product, and to safe medication management. That is, making sure that the right drug gets to the right patient.

Barcodes do help us in a number of areas in the hospital, applying these medications and putting them into our packaging machines. Each step of this process requires that validation and barcodes tracking, and traceability really allow us to do that in an automated fashion.

With barcodes, we're able to remove a lot of the human processes. This is really important for us when we look at a product recall situation. We want to know immediately where these products may be within our hospital, and also what patients may have received these recalled products. And without barcodes, it really becomes a very manual, slow process, which obviously isn't optimal for the patient or the staff.

An integral part of the closed loop medication management system is that of the barcode on the medication itself. In order for this system to work, the last part of it, which is the verification of the medication at the bedside, by a nurse scanning the patient, the medication order in the system, and the medication itself. All of our medications need to be barcoded in a unit of issue, ready to administer that requires no further manipulation by nursing staff.

We have started to notice that many manufacturers are moving towards putting barcodes on their products. Not only at the carton level, which there have been in place for some time, but many manufacturers now are adding it to the unit of use of their product. This is very encouraging.

We're not at a hundred percent yet and that would be our goal is that everything we receive in pharmacy does have a barcode at the appropriate use level, but if the remaining manufacturers come on board, I believe that we can see huge transformation within the system that will contribute to better safety for our patients.

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