

Intermec/Infolinx RFID Finds Home In Healthcare App

Increasingly, RFID vendors are finding that, while the supply chain may be their ultimate target market, smaller closed-loop apps may be what actually drive adoption. Not long ago, we interviewed Mitch Medford, CEO at **RF Code**. Medford told us about a new RTLS system the company is offering for tracking assets in hospitals. And now, **Intermec** and **Infolinx** are finding new opportunities to market their wares in an installation that is helping **Capital Health System** track patient files in its sleep center. According to the joint press release issued by Intermec and Infolinx, Capital Health System is using RFID to help meet patient-information security issues outlined under 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

September 14, 2007

First, Intermec Gen2 RFID tags are placed on every patient file. A series of Intermec IF4 fixed RFID readers are then placed in strategic locations around the sleep center to program the tags and track them as they are used around the complex. The system automatically updates the database to provide accurate, current record location data. Intermec 750 handheld computers with IP4 RFID readers are used in situations where files can't be located and for regular audits of offices to ensure files are not misplaced.

The new application intrigued us, and, fortunately, we were able to question not only representatives from Intermec and Infolinx, but from the customer, as well. Those we interviewed were: Chip Benson, Infolinx director of business development; Chris Kelley, Intermec director of RFID; and Rita Brooks, administrative director for the sleep center, Capital Health System. Following are their answers to our questions.

Are the tags being used for location purposes only?

Benson/Kelley: Yes.

If so, has anyone ever thought of using the tags to actually carry patient data?

Benson: I believe this has been done with 2-D symbologies. There are several concerns regarding this matter. The first is HIPAA and the privacy issue. The second is the amount of information that can be stored on this tag. It is limited to 96 bits.

Kelley: Patient data is not on the tags. A unique identifier is used on the tags and all patient information is in the secured database.

Other than helping to thwart lost files, how does this system help meet HIPAA restrictions? Does it in any way restrict who sees the files, as I believe this is the crux of what HIPAA is trying to achieve...patient privacy?

Benson: It does allow for less information to be displayed on the outside of the folder if one chooses. However, it doesn't prevent anyone from looking at the file. The main purpose is to have more control-knowing where the file is at any given time and where it has been. It also helps in locating a file much faster, should it get misplaced.

Kelley: The benefits are compliance, avoiding lost files and minimizing risk.

Are there any plans to elaborate on what this system can offer?

Benson: As the technology advances and if the

conditions are right, we will explore new ideas. From a software standpoint we are always looking to reduce risk and improve efficiency.

Kelley: There are opportunities to expand RFID to track assets and other supplies.

How long did it take to develop the system?

Benson: It took several months to fully integrate and test the Intermec RFID with the Infolinx records management software.

How long does it take to install/implement?

Benson: The short answer is within weeks, but realistically much more planning and discovery needs to be done in order to have a successful installation. A typical records management implementation can take anywhere from two months up to a year. Adding RFID only adds a small amount of time and effort.

How long is the training cycle?

Benson: Usually two to four days. The key is timing-the system should be rolled out immediately after training.

We are both just waiting until they have completed their move in and are ready to roll it out to the entire staff. So to clarify Rita's answer (below), it's not that we haven't given them training, it's just they have been ready for it yet. We did of course give them initial training to start. We have found the key to a successful implementation is to schedule the training within days of rolling the software out to the users. If training is done too early, retention of the skills until the time of implementation becomes an issue.

What kind of cost is associated with a system like this one and what is the ROI time?

Benson: Obviously, Capital Health System believes it to be worth the expense. Costs can vary from project to project and it is very hard to measure the ROI. It is not just the time savings, but more of an issue of compliance and having control over mission critical files. A misplaced file can mean many people-hours to reproduce the data if it can be reproduced at all. There are times and instances that it can also involve lawsuits. Reducing this risk is paramount.

Kelley: Benefits are to minimize risk from lawsuits and track files in less time for compliance.

Capital Health System

How did you find out about the Intermec/Infolinx RFID system?

Brooks: The company was recommended by **Spacesaver Systems**.

Did you have any reservations about using RFID?

Brooks: No. The process was much more user-friendly than bar coding technology.

How did you rationalize the expense of the system to those who must okay the expenditure?

Brooks: Time savings associated with locating charts and the integration of a patient database, which allowed input to one system instead of two.

Why are you only using it in the sleep center? Is it because of the complexity of the center, i.e., patients moving around a lot?

Brooks: Patient charts are constantly moving through the sleep center and needed for other purposes as they move through the processes.

Are you planning to expand your use of the system to other areas?

Brooks: Other areas of outpatient services (physician practices) are interested in the technology.

How did your staff react to the system?

Brooks: They like it, though they would like additional training.

Was there a lot of training that needed to be done?

Brooks: Minimal training to begin with as we used the system in a limited framework initially.

If so, were you given the help you needed with the training program?

Brooks: We were well supported, but would like additional training when the system is completely set up in our new location.

Any other comments?

Brooks: We are very happy with the system and hope to have it fully installed and functional in our new sleep center in the next month or so.

Comment: As we see it, the importance of this article really isn't about whose technology is being used, although Intermec and Infolinx are certainly prominent vendors. What this application shows is there are infinite uses for RFID if we only employ our imagination. And, what's more, there are many cases—ones we haven't even thought of—where RFID costs are justified and quick ROIs can be obtained.

For more information: **Infolinx**, Kensington, MD, PH (301) 942-1224, Email: info@infolinx.com;
Intermec Technologies, Everett, WA, PH (425) 265-2172,
Email: lan.obrien@intermec.com,
Web site: www.intermec.com. **SCAN**