

13 Points to Consider: Selecting the Right Wristbands - a Positive Step toward Patient Safety

As you automate clinical processes and move to electronic health records, there is a tremendous opportunity to improve patient safety and the quality of care. However, to ensure success, these programs must be built on a solid foundation of positive patient identification.

The #1 National Patient Safety Goal

The Joint Commission certainly agrees –accurate patient identification continues to be the number one National Patient Safety Goal for 2011-2012. And that’s where technology makes a significant contribution. By adding bar codes and photos to patient wristbands and documents, you can establish positive identification at the point of care and assure all diagnostics, treatments and medications administered during a patient’s stay are associated with the right patient.

The Devil is in the Details

However, as with any implementation, the devil is in the details. Automating a poor process will only accelerate errors and heighten risk. Moreover, selecting the wrong style wristband can undermine efforts to improve patient safety. The wristband must not only accommodate your technology requirements, but also must meet special clinical requirements while optimizing patient comfort.

We consulted with Sue Murphy, MS, RN, a nurse with extensive clinical and process improvement experience. As a clinical and workflow expert, Sue recommends early involvement of clinicians, registration staff and wristband vendors in a hospital patient identification planning program. “Your clinicians and registration staff understand the environment and the workflows associated with the wristband. You can trust them to alert you to any special challenges they foresee.” Sue notes that most qualified wristband vendors to include in the patient identification planning program are those with both clinical and technology experience. “The right vendor will guide you in developing a wristband program to address important system and clinical issues that impact positive identification, scannability, information security and ease of use, as well as patient safety and comfort,” she concluded.

She offers this guidance in selecting wristbands.

Be Cognizant of the Wristband Material

The best band is made of materials that:

1. Withstand extreme conditions in the clinical environments: moisture from bathing, perspiration, treatments
2. Are non-porous and resist absorption of contaminants or germs
3. Are non-latex and are generally hypo allergenic
4. Are flexible and support comfort, yet are rigid enough to support bar code scanning and are legible.

Give Careful Thought to Wristband Design

The best band is well designed so that:

1. It is easy to apply without an undue workflow for staff, such as application of a fold over laminate
2. It maintains a clean environment without setting up a reservoir for contamination.
3. It does not create undue disturbance to the patient, such as excessive handling at time of application, need for adjustment, or presence of uncomfortable tags or buttons
4. All shapes and sizes of patients can be accommodated.
5. The right patient is correctly identified without tampering for the entire length of stay.

Consider Technology Requirements

The technology and service level requirements of the best band are addressed so that:

1. Bar codes and photos have appropriate amount of real estate.
2. Materials used support legible printing and easy scanning.
3. Print size and margins used produce legible images.
4. Wristbands function as expected with output devices before go live.

