

Tracking the Goods

Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital is making use of RFID to reduce inventory shrinkage.

by Stacey Kramer

Executives at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) needed a better way to track assets and eliminate the need for nurses to hunt down key medical equipment, says BWH CIO Sue Schade. After all, when essential medical equipment goes missing at the 747-bed nonprofit Harvard Medical School teaching affiliate, it's the nurses who end up trying to locate them.

"They didn't go to nursing school to spend time being hunters and gatherers," Schade says.

To choose an equipment tracking vendor, BWH developed a criteria matrix. The Massachusetts hospital wanted something that would match its IS and electronic medication administration record (eMAR) infrastructure, was Web-enabled and



Sue Schade

had active radio frequency identification (RFID). Lawrence, Mass.-based Radianse was a match.

In doing a year-long pilot with the Radianse system, BWH was able to discover where its inventory shrinkage was coming from, track it in real time with the indoor positioning system and change

the hospital's organization process to correct the problem.

BWH is now tagging its most expensive assets — from a \$1,000 pulse oximeter to a \$15,000 mobile monitor. The hospital plans to tag 6,000 assets, and gross savings projections are \$300,000 per year.

"We now know that certain assets tend to leave from the service elevators and the utility areas," says BWH Director of Biomedical Engineering Michael Fraai. As patients' beds are

turned over, some assets are often rolled into the linens and into the compacter, he says.

During the pilot, Brigham had the system set up so tagged assets alarms were sent to the nurse in charge, though they later had the unit secretary or operations coordinator notified. That way, if a tagged asset leaves by accident with a patient, "they can actually get up and go to the elevator and catch it before leaving the floor," he says.

When implementing hospital asset tracking, Schade and Fraai say it's important to get an organizational buy-in early. In addition, they say it's easier to implement the system at the front-end because system installation requires the room to be vacant, a luxury Brigham and Women's doesn't often have. Instead, BWH plans to set up its indoor positioning system in off-hours or on long holiday weekends.

NEW CONTRACTS AND INSTALLATIONS

■ **PeriOptimum, Pittsburgh**
PathFinder (workflow management and patient tracking)
Erie County Medical Center, Buffalo, N.Y.

■ **MedMined, Birmingham, Ala.**
Data Mining Surveillance (infection tracking)
Union Hospital, Terre Haute, Ind.

■ **Streamline Health Solutions Inc., Cincinnati**
(Documentation workflow solutions)
The Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Neb.

■ **Agfa Corp., Mortsel, Belgium**
MPAX (radiology information system and scheduling solutions)
University of California San Diego Medical Center

■ **Imprivata, Lexington, Mass.**
OneSign ESSO (password management)
Memorial Healthcare, Owosso, Mich.

■ **CodeCorrect, Yakima, Wash.**
Denials Manager (claims management)
Exeter Hospital, Exeter, N.H.