

Fear Over Health Sector Job Losses Could Slow The Adoption Of RFID

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7th December 2004. Cambridge, UK: Wireless tagging technology could help health providers save lives, improve workflow efficiency and reduce the cost of caring for patients. However, according to a report to be published later this week by the Cambridge UK based consultancy Wireless Healthcare, a fear of job losses and the belief that the provision of healthcare cannot be automated will slow the deployment of potentially life saving technology.

The report, 'Selling Wireless Tagging To The Healthcare Sector', describes a number of scenarios within which wireless tagging could improve the safety and efficiency of clinical processes and supporting services. It also highlights equivalent processes within the financial services and manufacturing sectors that have already been automated and, as a consequence, are less labour intensive and provide the public with lower-cost products and services. "The refusal to accept that it is possible to automate some clinical processes is preventing the healthcare sector from entering the twenty first century," states Peter Kruger, Senior Analyst with Wireless Healthcare.

The report contrasts the different strategies the NHS and the fast food restaurant McDonald's have adopted to combat problems associated with hygiene, cleanliness and the failure of staff to adhere to basic procedures. While the UK health provider is falling back on procedures and operating practices that date back several decades, McDonald's is experimenting with a wireless system that ensures staff comply with inspection procedures.

The report describes a scenario within which a tagging system is used to ensure medical staff use a hand washing station after attending to a patient. Such a system would help stop the spread of an infection from one patient to another within a hospital ward. "While some clinicians may feel this level of monitoring smacks of 'Big Brother', in practice it would alert the health worker to a potential problem before a patient comes to harm," explains Kruger. The report also points to applications such as the use of patient tagging to ensure appropriate medicines are prescribed and that the correct surgical procedures are carried out.

Wireless Healthcare warns vendors that some of the objections, such as potential infringements on patient privacy, could mask more fundamental concerns over the use of wireless tagging. Health workers may fear that automation will result in the deskilling of tasks and job losses. The report points out that, as the NHS is the largest employer in the UK, the automation of even a few basic procedures within the organisation would result in a large number of job losses. These job losses would come on top of redundancies amongst back office workers that will occur when NPfIT applications and services are rolled out. The report recommends a number of strategies vendors can adopt to overcome resistance to automation, and profiles a number of vendors who have successfully positioned their wireless products within the healthcare market.

Wireless Healthcare is a UK based consultancy specialising in the application of mobile and wireless technology in the healthcare sector.

The company recently published 'Wireless Healthcare 2004', its annual report on the wireless ehealth industry, which describes how existing and next generation healthcare providers could use wireless and mobile technology to drive down costs and increase efficiency.

The report "Selling Wireless Tagging To The Healthcare Sector" is available from www.wirelesshealthcare.co.uk

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