RFID as the Critical Factor for Superior Healthcare Delivery

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**INTRODUCTION**

Innovations in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed the manner in which healthcare organizations function. Applications of concepts such as data warehousing and data mining have exponentially increased the amount of information that a healthcare organization has access to. Work flow and associated Internet technologies are being seen as instruments to cut administrative expenses. Specifically designed ICT implementations, such as work flow tools, are being used to automate the electronic paper flow in a managed care operation, thereby cutting administrative expenses (Dwivedi, Bali, & Naguib, 2005, p. 44; Latamore, 1999).

These recent innovations in the use of ICT applications in a healthcare context have altered the manner in which healthcare institutions exploit clinical and nonclinical data. The pendulum has shifted from the early 1980s, wherein the emphasis of ICT solutions for healthcare was on storage of data in an electronic medium, the prime objective of which was to allow exploitation of this data at a later point in time. As such, most of the early 1980s ICT applications in healthcare were built to provide support for retrospective information retrieval needs and, in some cases, to analyze the decisions undertaken. Clinical data that was traditionally used in a supportive capacity for historical purposes has today become an opportunity that allows healthcare stakeholders to tackle problems before they arise (Dwivedi et al., 2005).

However, simultaneously, a number of studies have noted that most information in healthcare is stored in silos, which do not interact efficiently with each other. Kennedy (1995, p. 85) has quoted Keever (a healthcare management executive) who notes that “Healthcare is the most disjointed industry … in terms of information exchange…. Every hospital, doctor, insurer and inde-
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Table 1. Adapted from Modern Healthcare’s annual survey of information system trends in the healthcare industry (Dwivedi, Wickramasinghe et al., 2007; Meletis et al., 2006; Morrissey, 2000, 2001, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of healthcare organizations surveyed</td>
<td>224 healthcare organizations</td>
<td>212 healthcare organizations</td>
<td>255 healthcare organizations</td>
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Clinical Use of Web technology (Intranets)
- 60% - felt that IT could facilitate data exchange among caregivers, that is, physician ordering of tests and access to test results
- Low interest in maintaining a patient’s personal health record accessible via the WWW and matching patients with clinical research.
- However there is renewed importance of addressing changes in this area due to regulatory obligations
- Despite acknowledging that medication interaction and dosing alerts are possible within most IS - implementation has not commenced
- The few organizations who had made big investments in different HIS (EPR and pharmacy) are reporting substantial returns

General Uses of Web and Intranet technology
- Limited use as shown by the following
  - 15% - to share clinical guidelines
  - 13% - to access multiple databases simultaneously
  - 33% - as a bridge to other information systems
  - 40% - for network wide communication of any kind
- Some early success from linking “billing and insurance-query operations to payers via the Web”
- “Significant interest …in using the Web to improve data exchange with physicians and their office staff”
- About 50% indicated that they had no plans to try anything Web-related in the care-management area
- 33% - Using existing clinical and financial information sources to construct data repositories so as to that help spot trends and improve decision-making
- Further 22% are working to implement such practices whilst about 13% plan to start implementation of similar activities within a year

A survey of WLAN healthcare installations found that 97% of customers indicated that “WLANs met or exceeded their expectation to provide…a competitive advantage” and that “if the productivity benefits are measured as a percentage return on the total investment … the return works out to be 48%” (McCormick, 1999, p.13). The use of PDAs by physicians has witnessed rapid acceptance in recent times. Today, about 40% of all physicians use PDAs (Serb, 2002). However, the majority of physicians are using PDAs to perform static functions. Most of them use PDAs to collect reference material with:

- the most popular method being ePocrates - a drug reference application physicians can look up drugs by name or diagnoses, cross-reference similar medications or generic alternatives, and receive alerts on interactions…and which the Journal of the American Medical Association has described as indispensable. (Serb, 2002, p. 44)

A few pioneering physicians have started to use PDAs in an interactive way, that is, to write prescriptions, to keep a record of all daily clinical patient interactions, and for bedside charting. This trend was confirmed by another study by Martin (2003), who noted that more then 50% of physicians working in developed countries and under the age of 35 used a PDA in 2003.

Similar findings were also reported in other studies. In a related survey, it was found that between 40-50% of all U.S. physicians (including junior doctors, i.e., residents) were either using a PDA or had the ability and the knowledge to use a PDA in healthcare settings (Miller, Hillman, & Given, 2004).
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