

Health Information Compliance Alert

Identification Strategies: Still Relying on Wristbands? Upgrade Your Patient ID Tracking With These Ideas

Here's what can be done to comply better.

Mistaken identity may add spice to detective novels but you don't want intrigue where patients' care is concerned. If you don't have a failsafe system for identifying and labeling your patients, you're inviting all sorts of medication and testing errors. Fortunately, you can improve your facility's patient ID process through an array of strategies and interventions that will greatly reduce the risk of patient misidentification.

Wristbands alone won't cut it. Missing bands or incorrect information on those bands limits their efficacy. Color-coded bands can help with rapid identification but if you lack a standardized coding system, this can lead to errors by staff that provides care at multiple facilities.

Overhaul your ID and tagging system with these tech-savvy approaches:

Combine Photos and Bands

There are advantages to using combined technologies. And, when using more than one identifier, patient safety can only be enhanced. Now, also keep in mind that some healthcare facilities may have difficulty with their patients not wearing their wristbands. So, what do they do? Try this approach which is to include the individual's photograph in the clinical record for purposes of visual identification by staff.

Wristbands that cannot be easily removed in addition to photos taken at the time of admission are the safest identifiers. So use both wristbands and photo badges as identifiers. Also, when the patient's electronic medical record contains a color photo of the individual, face recognition can also be established when medication is administered.

Photos that are high resolution and are stored in the hospital's information system can be available for future stays and/or other documentation.

Cost-effective and reliable: The wristbands should be durable and high-resolution. Direct thermal printers create the text, bar code, and photos directly on the wristbands. Since there is no printer ribbon or toner cartridge to replace, this saves some money in the long run. The wristband system vendor would need to develop a direct thermal label to replace the hospital's handwritten nametags. The durable name tag labels would use the same printer and include a patient name and photo.

Tamper-proof: Wristbands can be made of durable latex-free material and feature either a tamperproof snap closure or adjustable adhesive closure.

Implement Two-ID Requirement

Two identifiers are an additional safeguard against mix ups because it elevates the level of safety. It is extremely important to ensure that correct information, treatment and medication is given to the appropriate individual.

The intent of the two identifier requirement is two-fold: to reliably identify the individual as the person for whom the service or treatment is intended and to match the service or treatment to that individual.

As a result, the two patient/client/resident-specific identifiers must be directly associated with the individual. Those same two identifiers must be directly associated with the medications, blood products, specimen containers (such as on an

attached label), other treatments or procedures.

For high-risk interventions or in settings with less stable staffing and short length of stay, the full "two identifier" system makes better sense.

Involve Patients and Family

Another way to promote positive patient identification is to make the family and the patient part of the process, according to the **World Health Organization**. Here are some ways to make this happen:

- Educate patients about the risks related to patient misidentification.
- Ask patients or their family members to verify identifying information to confirm that it is correct.
- Ask patients to identify themselves before receiving any medication and prior to any diagnostic or therapeutic interventions.
- Encourage patients and their families or surrogates to be active participants in identification, to express concerns about safety and potential errors, and to ask questions about the correctness of their care.