

MedicAlert Aims to RFID-Enable Medical Records

The nonprofit company is launching a pilot at California State University-Stanislaus to see if RFID can speed data collection at the point of medical service.

By Claire Swedberg

Feb. 16, 2007—This month, emergency medical information service provider [MedicAlert Foundation](#) and [California State University-Stanislaus](#) (CSU) will begin testing whether RFID-enabled medical cards can provide a more efficient method of collecting and forwarding patients' health-related data at the point of medical service.

About 200 students at the university's health center will each receive a plastic MedicAlert card embedded with an RFID chip containing a unique ID number that maps to that cardholder's medical information, stored in a server managed by MedicAlert. The ID cards are equipped with 13.56 MHz RFID tags compliant with the ISO 15693 air-interface standard. The nonprofit organization hopes the pilot will help it move toward its goal of automating its best-known system, a bracelet engraved with critical details about a person's health conditions and medical requirements. Also engraved on the bracelet is a telephone number for emergency personnel to call for additional details about the individual, based on the bracelet's serial number. Four million people worldwide, about 2.3 million of which live in the United States, wear MedicAlert bracelets.

During the 12-week CSU pilot, participating students will visit the health center once per week to have their ID numbers captured by an interrogator mounted at an RFID kiosk. That data is then directed, via MedicAlert's server, to the medical center's computer, where a record is printed for the staff—all within a matter of seconds. The center and MedicAlert will test how well the system collects data about each participating student and forwards that data to the medical center personnel. The system is intended to eliminate the need for a patient to fill out a form upon each visit to a doctor's office. It is also designed to reduce the time spent by office workers searching for files each time that patient visits. The pilot will incorporate RFID readers supplied by [Siemens IT Solutions and Services](#) and computer hardware from [Advanced Micro Devices](#) (AMD).

CSU-Stanislaus was chosen for the pilot because of its proximity to the MedicAlert offices. In addition, says Ramesh Srinivasan, MedicAlert's vice president of business development, the firm also already has a working relationship with the school.

The CSU-Stanislaus Medical Center is especially interested in the potential future uses of the system, including whether it could speed the transmission of data for athletes and other student patients to health-care providers outside the medical center, making it possible to issue referrals in a matter of minutes rather than days. "We thought that would be an interesting way to use the system," says Stacey Morgan-Foster, student affairs vice president. However, she notes, "we are in the first step now, and after we complete that, then we can talk about other possible uses."

RELATED_ARTICLES If the trial goes well, MedicAlert hopes to expand its RFID system by conducting further trials at other colleges across the state or country. "Once this pilot is tested out and we have the comfort level of the students, we plan to extend out to other medical centers," Srinivasan says. Students participating in the pilot receive a free one-year membership to MedicAlert, along with the RFID-enabled ID card. They are also entered into a raffle with a cash prize.

Although MedicAlert's ID bracelets are not being utilized for the CSU pilot, the organization eventually intends to pilot RFID chips for use in the bracelets as well. "One of the challenges we face is that the bracelet works great, but we want to see how we [emergency personnel] could access the information faster or save a phone call," says Srinivasan. To make that system more effective, emergency workers would need to have RFID readers or RFID-enabled PDAs or laptops.

Copyright ©2005 RFID Journal, Inc. All Rights Reserved