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Hospitals Get Healthy Dose of RFID

Agility Healthcare Solutions, a new company formed by TrenStar to provide RFID-based management solutions to the healthcare industry, has announced its first contract. TrenStar, a Denver-based provider of RFID-enabled asset management solutions, announced the formation of its Agility subsidiary

earlier this month.



Fran
Dirksmeier

In a five-year deal valued at \$3.9 million, Agility will deploy, operate and manage an RFID network to track mobile medical equipment at the three Virginia hospitals operated by Bon Secours Richmond Health System. The three facilities are St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond Community Hospital and the Memorial Regional Medical Center.

"We use RFID to track and manage mobile assets and enhance healthcare workflow and business processes and are initially focusing on equipment management because it is a universal problem in hospitals. Not only do we track and manage mobile assets, we collaborate with our clients to improve business processes and automate workflow," says Fran Dirksmeier, the CEO of Agility, which is based Glen Allen, Va.

The RFID network in each hospital will be able to determine the exact location of all tagged medical equipment and other mobile assets. The system will also show whether each item is in use, available or in need of servicing. In the three Bon Secours hospitals, around 10,000 pieces of healthcare equipment will be logged in to Agility's inventory management system and fitted with Agility's active 303 MHz RFID tags in time for the networks to launch next month.

TrenStar and Agility engineered the network's readers

specifically for Agility's AgileTrac-managed mobile medical equipment management program, says Dirksmeier. By transmitting at 303 MHz, the readers will operate well outside the frequencies used by other medical or scientific telemetry systems found in hospitals and avoid the potential for interference. The frequency's long range also enables more complete coverage and doesn't limit the company in terms of setting up coverage zones, which can be as small as a closet or larger like a lobby area. Hundreds of readers have been deployed across the three hospitals, according to Agility.

The readers have built-in 802.11b capabilities to connect to a wireless LAN deployed to relay data from the hospitals' RFID network back to an inventory management system hosted by Agility. That wireless LAN capability is well suited to any hospital deployment.

"Hospitals reconfigure their layouts frequently, and not having to cable up readers is a great advantage," says Dirksmeier.

Agility, which is providing the entire system infrastructure and the tracking and inventory management applications as an outsourced service for a monthly fee, also has to track how its performance measures up against a series of metrics agreed with Bon Secours such as a reduction in the amount of equipment required at the hospital and the increase in productivity of hospital staff.

Prior to deploying the RFID inventory management network, Agility carried out a several month study of the hospitals' current asset tracking abilities. By deploying its AgileTrac program, the company maintains, Bon Secours will get a return on its investment within the first full year of operations. By deploying its AgileTrac program, the company maintains, Bon Secours will recoup the cost of Agility's monthly fee within the first full year of operations.

Agility Healthcare Solutions says inventory management is just the first of many RFID resource and workflow management services the company plans to offer to optimize asset utilization as well as reduce operating cost and improve care quality in the healthcare industry.

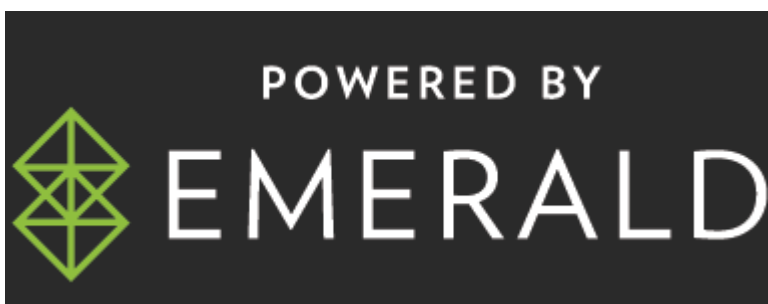
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