

Cook Children's pioneers 2D barcode system for vaccines

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FORT WORTH, TX – Cook Children's Health Care System, in partnership with athenahealth, Microsoft, Sanofi Pasteur and Merck, has launched a first-of-its kind program to use of 2D barcodes on vaccines.

As opposed to traditional linear barcodes, 2D barcodes – also known as quick response (QR) codes – can hold much more information. A quick scan can show a medication's National Drug Code (NDC), lot number, expiration date and more. "WAY better than the 'sticker method' we've used with paper charts, or the slightly better linear barcodes that can only hold NDC," explains Sean Nolan, chief architect of the Microsoft Health Solutions group, on his blog, [Family Health Guy](#). "When you add lot numbers and expiration dates, you can really improve quality of care."

Recently, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allowed an exemption to the existing requirement to use linear barcodes on vaccines. Now, in the wake of that new rule, physicians who use athenaClinicals, athenahealth's EHR platform, can simply scan a vaccine's barcode and have a wealth of information automatically incorporated into a patient's EHR.

[See also: [Barcoding is simple, but effective.](#)]

Officials say this new capability will grant a host of new physician capabilities that Cook Children's has been developing with athenahealth through its EHR since February of 2010, including:

- Better managing a practice's vaccine supply, which can lower costs
- Confirming that the vaccine about to be given is for the right child, in the right dose, and at the right time
- Sending notice of the vaccine dose to the state's vaccine registry automatically
- Creating a reorder to replace the administered vaccine

"Cook Children's is pleased to help achieve this groundbreaking milestone in the care of children," said Jason Terk, MD, a pediatrician with the Cook Children's Physician Network and medical director of PedsPal, Cook Children's Health Care System's physician group's

purchasing program. "This new barcode system not only allows us to enhance our level of care, but also sets the standard for the entire nation. As healthcare providers, it's important for us not to follow, but to take the lead, in using technology. We will be able, like never before, to meet the parents' needs in an efficient manner and in a way that fits their lifestyle."

[See also: [Bridging the gaps.](#)]

On his blog, Nolan notes how "scanning 2D codes with mobile phones is becoming everyday business thanks to the popularity of technologies like QR and Microsoft Tag. So we figured, why not give patients a mobile app to scan the vaccines and add the information automatically to a lifetime, personally-controlled HealthVault record? As a parent of two kids, I know how important immunization data can be."

He adds that "we did some testing and found that, while the tiny size of the vaccine bottles does put a bit of stress on the reading code, it's eminently doable and we're going to make it happen. We have a prototype running now, and as we continue to grow our mobile functionality and the barcodes become prevalent, you'll see it start to roll in."

"Let's face it, asking a parent to remember the last time their college-age child got a tetanus shot is unreliable, and the odds that their current doctor in San Francisco is aware that this shot was administered in Boston 20 years ago are slim at best," says athenahealth CEO and Chairman Jonathan Bush. "In healthcare, the ability to not only more effectively track vaccines but to build this data into an EHR platform that can follow the patient is an absolute game-changer, and we are confident that the forward thinking of Cook Children's to again utilize the power of our cloud-based clinical network is going to lead to an invaluable level of improved patient safety."

"Applications such as this one for vaccine management will help people to understand the importance of connecting information throughout the health system and making it promptly accessible to the people who need it, whether doctors, medical inventory managers, or parents caring for their children," said Peter Neupert, corporate vice president of Microsoft's Health Solutions Group. "We're excited to work with Cook Children's and athenahealth to deliver solutions to help improve care and empower families to manage their health."

Cook Children's will demonstrate the new 2D barcoding technology at the upcoming American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference being held from October 15-18 in Boston.

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Links:

- [1] <http://blogs.msdn.com/b/familyhealthguy/archive/2011/10/12/another-win-for-real-folks-2d-barcodes-on-vaccines.aspx>
- [2] <http://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/barcoding-simple-effective>
- [3] <http://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/bridging-gaps>