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Inside the Cath Lab: Tracking Supplies, Cutting Costs

Balancing needs, utilization and cost while improving patient care are central to the mission of the interventional cardiology team at Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital in Atlanta. The facility invested in inventory tracking seven years ago— when they were running out of supplies, couldn't keep up with managing key high-value devices, and needed to track costs—and are still reaping the benefits.

By Mary C. Tierney

Emory Saint Joseph's is a member of Emory Healthcare, the largest healthcare system in Georgia. With seven cardiac cath labs and three EP labs, Emory Saint Joseph's chose Cardinal Health™ Inventory Management Solutions to help with their operational excellence efforts, focused on inventory management and related workflows. "It made a world of difference for us," says Lisa Newton, BSN, RN, unit director for invasive cardiology. "And still does by enabling intelligence-based decision making."

Because inventory management can interface with other systems real-time, it cuts down on data entry redundancy and related errors, missing charges and instead allows nurses to focus on patients rather than counting devices. "I would just grab RFID-tagged supplies, wave them in front of the reader and it would auto-populate into my documentation system," says Newton, who was an EP nurse when the system was installed. "That was huge compared to manually counting devices, especially high-value devices costing upwards of $20,000."

Inventory no longer relies on people. It relies on real-time updates, from data captured automatically and accurately. Charges are captured for all devices and supplies, even with easy-to-access open cabinets.

Confidence in inventory means you don't need to keep extra inventory on hand. "We run a very tight, lean inventory," Newton says. "Even though we are very busy, we don't have a lot of products sitting on the shelves. And we have what the doctors need."

That level of confidence is also high for tracking devices to support patient safety initiatives, as the system holds the lot and serial numbers of implanted devices. If products are recalled, they can tell which patients have those items and can reach out to them. The same holds true to proactively manage an expired product.

Newton and her staff rely on daily reports to track missing inventory, reconciling each piece to each patient each day, and monitoring upcoming device expiration dates so they can go back to the vendor seeking a swap. The Smart Pars feature allows her to set PAR levels, which are adjustable based on spikes and dips. She also watches physician utilization to better manage preference items and reduce variability.

"We're all about how we can reduce our costs right now," she says. "Every quarter, I review reports to see what I may be able to buy in bulk. I can see exactly down to the item number, what we are using and project what

we will need. We save quite a bit of money buying in bulk, especially at the end of the quarter. For virtually every product, there's an opportunity to save money—but you need to be able to track inventory closely."

System-wide, Emory Healthcare has initiated value acceleration projects (VAP) via a VAP team that looks at utilization. Having product data allows them to have conversations on utilization on a system level. "Then we go back and speak with the physicians about what they are using and sometimes make changes based on knowledge," Newton notes. "No manual process can do that. We are definitely making better decisions on products for our patients."

It all comes down to better decision-making to balance patient care needs, utilization and cost. "I'm grateful for [the solution] every day," she says. "Every time I have to order."

As seen in
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