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Robots Are The Wave Of The Future *They Cut Hospital Costs And Improve Patient Care*

The late, great football coach **George Allen** was apt to say, "The future is now." So, too, it could be said of the hospital industry's growing acceptance of automated delivery robots as a smart and sensible way to enhance productivity, save money and enrich patient care.

In an increasing number of hospitals around the country, robots are freeing up clinical staff to do what they do best – focus on the patient. In doing so, these hospitals are seeing noticeable cost savings and increased efficiencies in every area that robots touch. Robots are particularly attractive to hospitals that are opening new patient towers, increasing square footage and distances between critical areas, and looking for the most sensible way to support the additional space.

What these hospitals are discovering is that automated robots can deliver, track and retrieve goods and supplies more reliably and more cost effectively than other solutions.

They operate 24/7, don't get sick or injured, don't take breaks or vacations, don't require benefits, and don't complain. On average, one robot can provide the productivity of 2.8 employees yet costs less than a single FTE.

Robots provide value hospital-wide. For pharmacies, robots ensure timely and reliable delivery of medication to nurses' stations throughout the hospital, either scheduled or on demand. The best ones also have tracking capabilities, which broaden the value proposition beyond just labor savings to aid in regulatory compliance, error reduction and chain-of-custody concerns. In food service, robots deliver meals to patient floors and return dirty trays back to the kitchen. Robots support environmental services by retrieving soiled linens, regulated waste and trash, ensuring a sanitary environment, and improving infection control. All these functions and more come without the cost of additional personnel while freeing up existing staff to focus on high-value tasks.

At **El Camino Hospital** in the Silicon Valley, 19 robots are helping the hospital run more efficiently and cutting costs by \$650,000 a year. Moving unassisted around the hospital without the need for any special infrastructure, these robots carry medical supplies and patient meals, laboratory specimens and prescription drugs, linens, and equipment as well as trash and waste safely through the hospital. They travel the hallways and elevators announcing what they are about to do, such as "crossing hallway" and "turning around." They even reply "thank you" after completing a delivery.

Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center installed a fleet of state-of-the-art robots to transport linens and remove trash from throughout the facility. These robots deliver clean sheets and gowns to patient floors, remove and transport soiled linens and transport trash for disposal. As in other facilities, these robots are viewed as a sensible approach to providing basic supply and transportation needs, covering a lot of ground, performing a function that may be invisible to patients but critical to hospital operations.

At the **University of California–San Francisco Medical Center**, the laboratory staff loads its robots with blood products, selects a pre-programmed destination on a computer touch screen, and presses the robot's "go" button. The robot is then on its way to a medical wing of the hospital, transporting blood for transfusions. When it reaches its destination, point personnel enter an electronic code to unlock the cart cabinet and access the contents. Staffers sign to confirm the blood products were received; the robot then returns the signed documents to the laboratory.

The future is indeed now, and now is the time for hospitals to embrace this latest wonder.

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**By Aldo
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