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ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY

Technology in the Hallway: A 21st Century Approach to Supply Chain Logistics

BY ALDO ZINI

If hospital CEOs could put together their "wish lists," included among the desires found on that inventory would likely be three universal themes: enriched patient care, enhanced productivity and cost-saving, quality-oriented solutions to everyday challenges. Not too much further down the list would be three more wants: finding smart ways to innovatively

use new technologies to address workforce shortages, automate supply chain logistics and make efficient use of available resources.

While no one magic wand can make all of these wishes come true, an increasing number of hospitals around the country – including several right here in Illinois – are finding that there is one 21st century solution that is coming pretty darn close. These forward-thinking hospitals are

turning to autonomous robots as an answer to these challenges.

Robots have been providing value in hospital operating rooms over the past decade, but seeing robots travel the hallways is still a relatively new phenomenon. But a phenomenon that can save thousands of dollars in labor, asset management and "lost" medications. On average one robot, which is available to work around the clock, can provide the

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productivity of 2.8 employees yet costs less than a single FTE.

Hospital leadership may want to consider automating deliveries, supply chain logistics and medication tracking when they are looking at ways to:

- Reduce turnaround times for deliveries from pharmacy, dietary, environmental services and central supply.
- Add room service meal capability.
- Expand the facility, which increases the travel distances between where supplies are housed and nursing stations.
- Centralize the delivery function.

Robots support the pharmacy operation by ensuring 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. Robots support food service by delivering meals to patient floors and returning dirty trays back to the kitchen. Robots support the laboratory by delivering specimens, blood and other supplies in a secure and reliable manner. And they 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. For clinical staff, this means more time to focus on the patient

– and that's a scenario where everyone wins.

At Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield, five robots are supporting the food service department by providing consistent and dependable delivery of the hospital's room service patient meals. By doing so in an average of 32 minutes from order to delivery (well within the 45-minute standard), nutrition services hostesses have been able to spend an increased amount of time at the patient bedside, contributing to patient satisfaction scores that are among the best in class.

At Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, robots are being used for on-demand pharmacy deliveries. And at Adventist Bolingbrook Hospital in Bolingbrook, one robot is being used to deliver sterile equipment on demand to Labor & Delivery while another is employed to pick up soiled equipment from L&D and return it to environmental services.

Healthcare's future is continuing to evolve and technology on all levels is leading the way. As hospital leaders become increasingly challenged to find new solutions to old problems, automated robots are helping to transform the industry by increasing efficiency, reducing expenses and enhancing patient care. Maybe it's time for you to take a look at the exciting future that is already here.

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