

Credentialing Systems Screen Hospital Vendors

McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) in Montreal, Canada, recently announced that it has launched a new vendor credentialing program that “will ensure that all vendors are credentialed, meeting MUHC patient safety and quality standards, and receive official photo identification (ID) at every hospital visit.” The technology, provided by Vendorlink.ca, is also in place in the operating rooms at Montreal General Hospital, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal Children’s Hospital, and Montreal Neurological Hospital, as well as in Kingston General in Ontario. Patricia Lefebvre, Director of Quality, Patient Safety and Performance at MUHC states, “As vendors are an integral part of the hospital’s day-to-day operations and they spend a significant amount of time in clinical areas, it is crucial that they are aware of our quality and patient safety standards to apply them at all times.”

Donna Stanbridge, Associate Director of Nursing at MUHC, goes on to explain: “Hospital vendors are essential as they support our healthcare teams with many products and services. Wearing identification badges similar to those of our hospital staff will ensure that everyone follows the same safety regulations and standards. Patients as well as staff will know who they are interacting with, and we will have peace of mind that vendors are adequately prepared through the hospital credentialing process and that patient safety and privacy are being respected.”

How The System Works

Vendors register with Vendorlink.ca, where they are screened and registered for a fee that depends on the level of access required. The rate for vendor reps requiring patient access is \$249, while contractors without patient access register for \$159. Depending on the clearance required, vendors might be required to show they have received governmental privacy training, offer vaccination records, pass background checks, complete courses on infection control, and/or offer proof of product competency. Once they have successfully passed the screening and are registered, vendors present their credentials when seeking entrance at vendor kiosks (pur-

chased by the hospital). After those credentials are screened, the kiosk issues a temporary sticky badge.

Michelle Floh, President & CEO of Vendorlink.ca, which has been in operation since November, 2010, describes the process. “Think of it like a boarding pass,” she says. “If you go to the airport and enter your information into a kiosk, it issues a boarding pass. In our case, a sticky badge comes out with visual ID, what the vendor is there for, which department they are visiting, and if they have clearance.” When asked what would happen if a vendor shares his or her registration information with someone else, Floh explains, “Because there is visual ID, if the person seeking admission is not the same as the one on the badge, they will not be let in.”



Vendorlink.ca hospital kiosk issues badge to pre-screened vendor

At the present time, Vendorlink.ca operates only in Canada and currently services 19 hospitals in two provinces. “We host the whole system here,” says Floh. “Vendorlink.ca is a Canadian system. We don’t disclose user information. We are Canadian, hosted on Canadian soil, programmed for Canada to meet Canadian security and privacy needs. Those privacy needs are very different from the USA. For one thing, we have both national regulations and regulations from the individual provinces that change.” Floh does not rule out expansion to the United States, but says that, at this time, the emphasis is on a Canadian system “that partners with hospitals to provide management throughout all the stages of the process. All frontline staff take accountability for the safety of the patient and security of the institution. Our core competency is security.”

A US Credentialing Service

A company offering a similar vendor credentialing service in the United States is VCS (Vendor Credentialing Services), located in Houston, TX and in operation for the past 10 years. While similar to Vendorlink.ca, “we offer different products as well, including physician credentialing, staff credentialing, and sanction screening (government watch lists),” according to Matt Read, VP Sales & Marketing for VCS. “We can use kiosks or also use smart phones. All credentials can be downloaded to smart phones. You put the smart phone on the scanner and a dated sticky badge will be issued, to be put on the hard badge that is issued on registration.”

One of the advantages of credentialing systems is that they can be customized for the needs of the individual client. “Hospitals are not set in their ways,” says Read. “Our system allows a level of flexibility all based on the individual requirements of a particular institution.” For example, he says, “many systems have a problem dealing with students under 18. Our system can set them up as the institution wishes, for example treating them like older medical students. The facility decides what is needed.” Because the hospital decides the level of credentials required for their particular institution, “this can help keep costs down, e.g., if the hospital doesn’t feel they need full background checks on a particular category, like nurse consultants.” As a result, Read says, “We are the most cost-effective on the block--a one-stop shop that is truly customer driven.”

Systems In Place At Mayo Clinics

One person very familiar with vendor credentialing is James Stansel, Coordinator Operations Supply Chain Management at the Mayo Clinic’s Jacksonville FL location, where he manages the credentialing system and has, most recently, taken on credentialing management for the larger Mayo Clinic enterprise. Just over four years ago, they transitioned to Reprax as their credentialing tool.

At the Jacksonville campus, they have two kiosks, one by the Security Office and another in the Supply Chain Department. When asked what Security Directors should keep in mind if considering vendor credentialing in their hospitals, Stansel advises, “Do your homework on the vendor and make sure it meets your needs.”



Mayo Clinic Jacksonville

Stansel says that the system in place at the Mayo Clinic, “allows for departments to ensure vendors who enter our facility meet the needed requirements for the area they call on.” As an example, he continues, “If a vendor rep has a case in one of our ORs, we know that he or she is fully credentialed before the procedure. They do not make it past security if they have any outstanding requirements.”

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