

HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Is It Time for a Better Hospital ID Bracelet?

Hospitals are souping up patient-identification wristbands with smart technology—and testing substitutes that get rid of the bracelet entirely.



Paige Hunt, a registered nurse at Wake Forest Baptist Health in Winston-Salem, N.C., gives Thomas Edens, a patient, an ID bracelet. PHOTO: WAKE FOREST BAPTIST HEALTH

By Lucette Lagnado

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The pesky but essential hospital ID bracelet is getting a makeover.

At hospitals across the country, the wristband bearing a patient's name and date of birth is going high tech or super sleek. And if some doctors have their druthers, it will disappear altogether.

Critics say ID bracelets collect germs and can be hard to read, leading to mistakes. They can fall off and get lost. While high-tech wristbands allow hospitals to track patients at all times, some doctors say the best bracelet is none at all.

Peter Costantino has spent three years developing a substitute. Dr. Costantino, chairman of head and neck surgery at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, came up with a shield-shaped adhesive strip that can be stuck almost anywhere on the body. Called "the Shield," it is being tested at Lenox Hill, a part of Northwell Health, on 50 neurosurgery patients, who also are wearing bracelets.



Dr. Peter Costantino, in his Lenox Hill Hospital office, is testing a replacement for the traditional hospital ID bracelet. PHOTO: AGATON STROM FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Dr. Costantino's first iteration was an ID tattoo, which he set aside in favor of a thin strip of polyurethane. The Shield usually is attached to a patient's arm or foot. It is wider than traditional bracelets so patient information is more legible, which may reduce the risk of errors, Dr. Costantino said. He plans to test if the Shield collects fewer germs than a traditional wristband. Both Dr. Costantino and Northwell Health have equity stakes in the company producing the Shield.

Dr. Costantino's wife, Laurie, inspired the invention, he said. For Mrs. Costantino, who spent time in the hospital for complications from brain-cancer surgery, the ID made a miserable situation worse. "The wristband always makes you feel that you are sick, that you are a patient," she said.



Nurse Practitioner Cynthia Lippes, above, affixed a 'Shield' ID, below left, to Matthew Mindell, a patient at Lenox Hill Hospital, and scanned it, below right. PHOTOS: AGATON STROM FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL(S)

When Matthew Mindell, a real estate broker, checked into Lenox Hill this month for neurosurgery, he received a bracelet and had Shields attached to his shoulder and foot. The locations were a matter of practicality and convenience, Dr. Costantino said: Mr. Mindell's foot was exposed during the surgery and his shoulder, unlike his arm, was clear of intravenous tubes. Mr. Mindell's reaction was unambiguous. The bracelet was "annoying, I wanted to pull it off," he said. The Shield "makes much more sense. No question."

Paul Allen, a pediatrician at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., also wants to scrap the bracelet. "Kids, especially the younger ones, hate it," he said. "It is not uncommon for me to go in and there is an 18-month-old and they grab their bracelet saying 'Off, off, off, off, off.'"

Dr. Allen and two partners developed BodyGuard ID, a temporary cosmetic ink that prints patient information directly on the skin. "It is not irritating, and the kids can't pull it off," he said. Last year, the BodyGuard ID developers won a \$15,000 innovation prize from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City and used some of it to apply for a patent, Dr. Allen said. They want to develop the device and make sure it can work safely on a large scale.

The hospital ID bracelet is "perhaps not the sexiest piece of technology," said Darren Dworkin, chief information officer at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles. But "it serves a real safety purpose in complex health-care organizations."



Dr. Paul Allen, above, says even very young patients resist ID wristbands. PHOTO: CHILDREN'S MERCY KANSAS CITY

Some hospitals are souping up their bracelets with new powers. "You are taking the same old wristband and making it smarter," said Adam Peck, a vice president of CenTrak, a Newtown, Pa., company that helps hospitals incorporate technology into wristbands.

St. Joseph Mercy Oakland Hospital in Pontiac, Mich., added CenTrak technology to bracelets to monitor patients' whereabouts. "You can track the patient from the time they arrive to the time they leave," says Robert Jones, head of information technology.

With a few clicks on a computer, a staffer can locate a patient anywhere in the hospital. When a patient is discharged, the hospital knows and can fill the vacancy. "We can get the bed cleaned and turned around" more quickly and efficiently, Mr. Jones said.

The winning streak comes amid a marked shift at the agency toward trying cases that are more complex before its administrative law judges. Historically, the SEC had more often turned to these judges for relatively straightforward legal actions, such as barring stockbrokers who had been convicted of criminal fraud. Thanks in part to enhanced powers granted in the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial-reform bill, the SEC lately has been using the administrative judges for complicated cases, including several involving insider trading.



Bracelets used at Wake Forest Baptist Health. PHOTO: WAKE FOREST BAPTIST HEALTH

Wake Forest Baptist Health in Winston-Salem, N.C., uses tech-enhanced bracelets to make sure cancer patients get enough exercise after surgery. "We measure the times they move from the room to the hall, and we can identify how many times a day they do that and how long they are out of the room," says Betsy Kraft, the clinical project manager helping to oversee the wristbands, which are made by CenTrak. To assuage possible patient concerns about such scrutiny, the devices don't track time in the bathroom, the hospital says.

At the David H. Koch Center, an outpatient center at New York-Presbyterian, patients and caregivers wear paper ID bracelets that are printed like airline boarding passes at a lobby kiosk. "We wristband patients but we also wristband family members," said Daniel Barchi, New York-Presbyterian's chief information officer. The bracelets allow individuals to get through security—and let the center track people as they navigate the facility.



At New-York Presbyterian David H. Koch Center, Sancia Doriane, a patient ambassador, helped patient Linda Golding with her wristband. PHOTO: RENE PEREZ/NEWYORK PRESBYTERIAN

Even fans of newfangled bracelets have their complaints. Linda Laskowski-Jones runs emergency and trauma services at Christiana Care Health System in Wilmington, Del. The emergency room there issues patients with wristbands as well as separate tags that have tracking technology linked to the information on the band. The tag, with CenTrak technology, is clipped to the front of the patient's gown. "If a family wants to know where a loved one is, we can say, 'Oh, your husband is getting a CT-scan,'" Ms. Laskowski-Jones said.

The low-tech ID wristbands don't conk out during power outages or computer crashes, she says, making them "a failsafe."

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