



# Data standards: a change worth making

**Chuck Franz**, chief information officer for Cook Group, explains why the company adopted GS1 global data standards.

**A**s electronic health records, eProcurement and unique device identification become high priorities for governments and health systems around the world, the healthcare industry is facing a data problem. Currently, our different IT systems can't communicate with each other most of the time. This leads to repetitive work and human error across the system, from procurement to the patient's bedside. At Cook Medical, we believe adopting global data standards across the industry will be the key to unlocking information and efficiency in healthcare.

Global data standards are particularly important to us at Cook, because more than 14 years ago, we faced many of the same issues that government agencies and hospital systems are facing now. Our own internal IT systems were not speaking the same language and were getting in the way of our ability to do business efficiently.

Adopting GS1 global data standards included applying Global Trade Item Numbers (GTINs) to all of our products and Global Location Numbers (GLNs) to all of our ship locations. It was an exhaustive process that touched every single area of our company and took years to accomplish. But, going through that process allows us to help lead the way as healthcare moves towards using global data standards, and share what we've learned with other organisations and governments who are going through their own processes.

We're committed to working with these

agencies, and we applaud anyone who is making the change to global data standards. We are fully capable of using GS1 standards to do business with our customers in the United States and Australia. The United Kingdom is next, and we're already starting to discuss pilot projects with our customers here.

As we begin this process in the UK, we'd like to share a few thoughts and learning from our past experiences. From almost 15 years of working with GS1, Cook has developed a few core beliefs on healthcare and data standards.

The first of these is that global data standards benefit patients. We believe things like complaint reporting and recall notification will become significantly easier when everyone uses the same identifiers for products. And, a wealth of information about products will be publicly available for the first time, which will help lead us to new discoveries about product usage and treatment pathways.

Secondly, global data standards make good business sense. There are very real problems in healthcare that adopting global data standards will help solve. Ensuring that products can be easily tracked from warehouses to the patient's bedside is crucial to preventing clinical and administrative errors. And, we also believe that eliminating repetitive work and human error throughout our systems will result in dramatic cost savings across the healthcare industry.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is that

all parties, whether device manufacturer, healthcare provider, government agency or otherwise, will have to work closely together as we make these changes. This means that all of us need to be willing to ask and answer difficult questions of each other. We've had to become comfortable with sharing certain regulated data and we've also been challenged by the variations in the data that is requested of us. This transparency and adaptability is necessary in order to adopt global data standards.

Their adoption, we believe, will add value to healthcare, not just regulatory burden and cost. We'll only get there by working together.

We know from experience that adopting global data standards is not quick or easy. However, we also firmly believe that it is the right thing to do and will help reduce costs across entire healthcare systems.

It will ultimately and most importantly better equip all of us to focus on what we're all here for: to provide quality patient care.

We'd love to hear your thoughts and questions on the movement towards global data standards.



Chuck Franz

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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