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## 6 Major Uses for Hospital Visitor Management Systems

By Anthony Zagami

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Hospitals face major security challenges. A large facility may have hundreds, or even thousands, of employees, vendors, contractors and visitors passing through each day. Then there are some of society's most vulnerable – newborns, the elderly and critically ill – to protect, along with millions of dollars worth of equipment, pharmaceuticals and other valuable items to preserve.

In most hospitals, patients wear arm bracelets, while staff, contractors and regular vendors have photo ID badges. It's the visitors that have been able to move about the facility without any identifying information.

That's changing as hospital administrator are adding another security layer – computer-based visitor management systems – capable of stopping known criminals, registered sex offenders and other potential troublemakers at the door.

Here's how these systems typically work in a hospital:

Visitors are directed to one or more stations located just inside the hospital's main lobby, emergency department or other public entrance. There, a visitor presents government-issued photo identification – driver's license, passport, green card or military ID – that is swiped through a reader allowing the information to be compared with national criminal and registered sex offender databases, as well as state and local databases. Warnings will be displayed on a monitor visible only to hospital staff. Each facility can also maintain its own lists of disgruntled former employees or people with court orders requiring them to stay away from hospital employees or patients.

In order to handle potentially difficult situations, many hospitals provide station operators with a discrete call button to summon security.

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As the check is in progress, the system takes a photo of the visitor. The entire process takes seconds to complete and ends with the visitor being presented with an adhesive badge, including name, photo and destination, that is to be worn at all times while in the hospital.

The data and photo from the ID are stored in the system, providing faster registration the next time a person visits. The photo helps keep the credential from being passed to another person, and the expiration date prevents reuse of the badge.

Now with everyone in the hospital required to wear some type of identification, it's much easier to spot someone who may have snuck into the facility. Any person without a badge can and should be challenged by security personnel.

Here are six other benefits a visitor management system provides.

**Safety** – In case of an evacuation (fire, flood, earthquake, hurricane, terrorist threat) local authorities and first responders want a complete list of who's in the hospital and what they look like. The visitor management system can provide that.

**Forensic investigation** – When assault, theft, vandalism and other crimes occur, a visitor management system can help include or exclude visitors as possible suspects. Investigators can also match faces from recorded surveillance video with those on ID cards stored in the visitor management system.

**Networking** – Multiple systems can be networked to link stations in a hospital, adjacent medical offices or other long-term care facilities under a common operator. Drawing from the same data, all systems can rapidly approve or block entry to a visitor at another networked station.

**Temporary badge creation** – Hospital employees that lose or forget their badges can receive a temporary credential to cover them for the day.

**Liability protection** – By checking everyone entering the facilities, administrators have shown their commitment to keeping unwanted, potentially dangerous people away from patients and staff.

**Compliance** – The visitor management system helps meet Joint Commission guidelines requiring hospitals to identify patients, staff and other people entering facilities. The system adheres to HIPAA regulations regarding patient privacy. A station operator can view the patient's name and room number and any visitor restrictions, but no health information is shared.

A major goal of the visitor management software is to move visitors through the process as accurately and quickly as possible. The system must be easy to use and require very little training. At many hospitals, volunteers are charged with operating the systems.

Correctly installed and operated, electronic visitor management systems can play a major role in meeting a hospital's difficult challenges in maintaining safe and secure facilities.

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Anthony Zagami is the founder and chief executive officer of the West Palm Beach, Fla.-based Security Identifications Systems Corp. (SISCO).

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