



May 13, 2010

HQCA endorses *Joint Technical Statement on Canadian Pharmaceutical Automated Identification and Product Database Requirements*

In 2009, the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) participated in a collaborative initiative to develop voluntary national standards for automated identification of pharmaceuticals in Canada. The initiative supports the vision of widespread use of technology to add another layer of patient safety to our medication-use system. The ***Joint Technical Statement on Canadian Pharmaceutical Automated Identification and Product Database Requirements***, published in January 2010, is an important outcome of the project, which is sponsored by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada and the Canadian Patient Safety Institute.

When medication moves through the health care system from manufacturer to patient, there are many stages where problems that impact patient safety can occur. Some are related to processes designed around non-automated (human) identification, tracking and documentation systems. Bar codes are a familiar sight on the exterior packaging of most medications in Canada where they help track the product for commercial purposes. Automated identifiers could be added to inner labels, such as ampoules, vials and blister packs, to improve patient safety. However their use is currently limited and hampered by a lack of standardization in identification systems. Until recently, there has been no standard system for assigning automated identifiers (e.g., bar codes) to pharmaceuticals in Canada or any explicit requirements for using bar codes to improve patient safety and efficiency of medication movement through the health care system.

The strategy detailed in the *Joint Technical Statement* is based on GS1 global standards for automated identification (e.g., bar coding) of pharmaceutical products, which was endorsed by project participants as the system that will be used in Canada. The *Joint Technical Statement* details technical compliance criteria to assist all Canadian health care sectors in implementing automated identification for pharmaceuticals marketed in Canada, including expectations of the manufacturing sector, professional practice organizations and end-users. It proposes a timeline for adoption of standards by all health sectors.

The HQCA encourages everyone in Alberta's health care system to support this important medication safety initiative by becoming familiar with the national standards specified in the *Joint Technical Statement*, and promoting their uptake and implementation throughout the medication system. More information can be found online at the ISMP website: <http://www.ismp-canada.org/barcoding/index.htm>.

For more information, contact Ms. Dale Wright at 403.355.4439 or dale.wright@hqca.ca