Executive Q&A

With Alex Zimmerman
System Director Supply Chain Technology,
Baylor Scott & White Health
Member of the GS1 Healthcare US Initiative Executive
Leadership Committee

Q: What are some key efforts within your company related to product data management, data quality and completeness that directly impact your company?

A: We have migrated to a Master Data Management platform where we are better able to match, merge, and consolidate Supplier, Location, Product, and Contract master data domains. By utilizing Global Trade Item Numbers (GTINs) and Global Location Numbers (GLNs) for location and product identification, these domains help us establish a single source of truth, consisting of golden records that are interoperable with other systems. And even more importantly, with this single source of truth, our caregivers are happier and able to provide better care to our patients.

Q: What current healthcare opportunities do you feel could be best served by the adoption and use of unique location identifiers?

A: There is no broadly accepted common identifier for locations within healthcare today. We have approximately 6,000 product suppliers and close to 1,000 locations to service our acute and non-acute centers of care, which requires the creation and maintenance of nearly 6,000,000 (i.e. 6,000 x 1,000) ship-to account numbers that we have to manage. Having inconsistent account numbers is our primary point of failure impacting our transactions today. This includes missing account numbers, incorrect pricing through contract rostering errors, and product mis-shipments. If all suppliers adopted GLNs across the board, we would only need to manage 1,000 GLNs to authenticate transactions. An established use of GLN could make things so much simpler and reduce overall costs.

Q: What do you see as key impediments to adoption and use of GS1 Standards throughout Healthcare?

A: There are tremendous opportunities available now that a unique identifier (UDI) is on product packages, but there is a lack of adoption among trading partners. Take daily transactions as an example – a proprietary code must be used for ordering, while a GTIN® is used when receiving the product. We have to maintain a cross reference file of GTIN and catalog numbers to manage everything. Having all of our trading partners come together to use this UDI information in lieu of proprietary information would be ideal.

Overcoming this challenge, along with many others, can be hindered by a lack of support from senior leadership. Working with thought leader organizations to have more communications with C-suite members will open the door for support of many crucial initiatives.

Q: What roles do you see GS1 Standards playing in healthcare in a post COVID-19 environment?

A: There may be opportunity around recall management, counterfeiting, supplier debarment, and supplier resiliency. COVID-19 put us in a position where we had to make new supplier relationships much faster and with much less information than we had before. Mechanisms to address these issues could be a huge opportunity in the years to come.