



Bar Code Medication Administration (BCMA)

The Right Drug, in the Right Dose, at the Right Time, to the Right Patient

Bar Code Medication Administration (BCMA) uses modern technology to address the serious issue of inpatient medication errors. It does this by electronically validating and documenting medications for patients. BCMA ensures that each patient receives the correct medication, in the correct dose, at the correct time, and visually alerts clinicians when the proper conditions are not met.

VA was one of the first medical organizations to develop and pilot bar code technology in administering medications. It started when a nurse at a VA medical center observed the use of a bar code scanner for rental car check-in and wondered why the same tool could not be used to make dispensing medications safer.

Now, in every VA inpatient facility, nurses use a wireless handheld bar code reader to match the bar code on the patient's wristband with the bar code imprinted on every medication dose. VA has reduced the occurrence of medication errors by two-thirds through the use of BCMA. A recent study (Bates and Leape) estimated inpatient medication errors or adverse events occur at a rate of 1 in 6.5 U.S. hospitalizations, except in VA hospitals.

The objective of BCMA is to improve the quality of care. Clinicians have immediate access to patient and drug information at the point-of-care. Decision-making capabilities are improved and communication between nurses, pharmacists, and physicians is enhanced through the use of BCMA.

