Hospitals and medical facilities are learning the value of RFID-enabled smart shelves to automate routine tasks and free up clinician time for patient care. The technology improves efficiency and leaves time and energy for the one thing that cannot be automated – one human being caring for another.

Healthcare facilities have long struggled to balance patient care with routine tasks. Inventory control, supply chain management and expired and recalled item identification take up time that could be spent with a patient. The COVID-19 pandemic put tremendous stress on hospitals, which further taxed patient care resources.

Technology now has an elegant answer to help balance the equation.

How an RFID Smart Shelf Works

When supplies or products arrive at your facility, they receive an RFID tag that connects them to your inventory management system. The items are stored in a smart shelf fitted with an RFID reader. When someone removes an item from the shelf, it passes in front of the RFID reader and your inventory system records the action.

If a clinician removes a product from a smart shelf on the 5th floor, and returns it unused to a smart shelf on the 7th floor, the inventory system knows exactly where the item is. If a device or supply is needed at one hospital and a sister hospital has it, you have immediate access to the item's location, and it can go where it is needed.

Smart cabinets go further, though. The software system constantly scans and tracks items still on the shelves, loading data into the MRP system and increasing inventory visibility overall. You know exactly how much of every product you have, where it is and what to order.

Smart Shelves Save Big Money

Your hospital has a mission of patient care, but it is still a business that has to bill for services. Often in the rush of urgent care, supplies and products may not be charged to a patient's account, directly impacting the hospital's bottom line. A smart shelf records use of the product as soon as it is removed from the shelf and the item can be tracked for charging.

Expired or recalled items can accidentally be used or not returned to the vendor in a timely manner. Hospitals lose hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in expired

items. Use of recalled items can threaten patient safety and incur liability for the facility. With smart shelves, your dashboard and the smart shelf alarm notify you of expired or recalled product.

With RFID inventory tracking systems, inventory is continuously monitored and real-time data is automatically uploaded to the MRP system. You always know exactly what is available, and over- and under-ordering become a thing of the past.

Smart Shelves Help You Stay Competitive

Healthcare is increasingly connected and automated. Yet patient expectations are high and margins are becoming tighter. In this environment, smart shelf technology gives you a needed edge.

As recently as 2019, [close to half of hospitals surveyed](#) were still using manual processes for supply chain management. Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents thought supply chain analytics could reduce costs, yet only 13 percent said supply chain management was their top priority.

Smart shelves offer a tremendous number of benefits for hospitals:

- Free up clinician time for patient care

- Improve patient safety

- Track expired items and recoup charges

- Order inventory knowing exactly what you need

- Eliminate stock-outs

- Manage your supply chain efficiently

- Know about recalls as soon as they come out

- Closely track chain of custody for pharmaceuticals and blood products

Start Small or Start Big

Fitting out an entire hospital with RFID smart shelves can be a challenge because departments are often siloed, usually for good reason. Supplies for an operating room are very different from those for a laboratory. RFID systems with FEIG support make it easy to tackle supply chain efficiency hospital-wide…or one department at a time.

Leveraging RFID smart shelf technology makes sense for many reasons, but at the end of the day, patient care is what it's all about. When patients have a good experience, they say so, and Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scores improve. Better scores can mean higher reimbursements from government and private insurers, and that is good news for your bottom line. FEIG knows RFID reader technology for healthcare. Find out how our RFID readers and antennas can support you in building a smart shelf solution.