



We often talk about patient rights — right product, right place, right patient, right time, right dose, right... but having the right product data in all the right systems to support these important patient rights sometimes has less rigour even in our increasingly digital world.

Product master data is critical for the healthcare supply chain, and yet we still see health professionals or their support teams resort to ‘crowd sourcing’, unverified spreadsheets and manual data entry as the method de jour for creating records about the products that are ordered, managed and used to provide care across Australian healthcare. Not only is the process open to potential errors but as we attempt to automate processes there is a need for all stakeholders to ensure their data is accurate and maintained correctly to support an efficient and accurate supply chain and a safe delivery of care.

The impact of bad product data cannot be underestimated

Product master data plays a critical role in the healthcare supply chain right through to where products are used with patients. At the start of the supply chain, it is the enabler of core business functions such as ordering and without correct data, these transactional processes cannot go ahead — or perhaps worse, will go ahead riddled with errors which then manifest in what products are received and the invoice and payment process. These kinds of errors, though behind the scenes in healthcare, add significant costs to the healthcare system each year.

In an Australian healthcare data crunch report that was published in 2014, the potential savings from improving product data quality were calculated to be over \$100 million annually — not insignificant, and yet sadly largely unrealised even today (reference <https://www.gs1au.org/download/GS1au-brochure-healthcare-data-crunch-report.pdf/file>).

With so much of healthcare focussed on supply chain surety and the use of analytics to ensure there is no disruption to care delivery, and improvements to supply chains can help reduce unnecessary cost/waste, accurate product master data is pivotal. Add to this the increasing requirement for reporting of dangerous goods, locally sourced products, and so many other factors plus the increasing need for unique identifiers that help manage products in inventory and at point of care and support the increased desire for automation and the impact of bad data only increases.

Accurate data starts and ends with good data management processes

A recent report published by KPMG focussed on the retail sector noted that in today’s consumer-driven world ‘the quality of a products master data is becoming as important as the quality of the products itself’. This same lesson rings true for healthcare, and the need for accuracy is often far greater given the types of products.

The initial source of the master data is the manufacturer of the product, but it does not stop there as the chain that brings products to Australia often includes local sponsors and distributors. The need to get the data right does not begin and end with them however as at each point that a product record is created or then shared, the same level of accuracy and completeness is needed to avoid error and unnecessary cost.

Managing master data as a key ongoing business process, most products change over time whether it is their ARTG, their Prosthesis Rebate Code, the link to their electronic instructions for use, or something as seemingly simple as the product identifier within the barcode may be changing. It's also important that any changes are communicated along the supply chain to all stakeholders as quickly as possible.

The solution has many parts

As part of GS1 collaborations over many years, GS1 has not only worked with sectors such as healthcare to develop global data standards, but our local collaboration within healthcare also led to the creation of the National Product Catalogue (NPC) as a tool to assist in the communication of structured product data directly from the sponsor to all relevant partners. This alone is not the solution to ensuring healthcare have quality product data throughout the sector, there is no silver bullet.

Accurate data requires data management processes across all organisations and needs organisations to engage in the conversation with their trading partners to reinforce why they need data, why it needs to be timely, and where they feel it is not correct. With the right processes in place to create and maintain the data, the right approach to collaborating to ensure quality and the right tools like the NPC we can get the foundations right.

For more information about implementing standards in healthcare contact [healthcareteam@gs1au.org](mailto:healthcareteam@gs1au.org) or visit [www.gs1au.org/healthcare](http://www.gs1au.org/healthcare).

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