

Our Legacy as Safety Specialists

The cover story in this issue of *BI&T*—focusing on the relationship of clinical engineers (CEs) and biomedical equipment technicians (BMETs) within patient safety—is quite timely. As clinical systems merge into hospital information systems, the need for professionals who can monitor this merger and focus on safety issues is paramount.

This doesn't mean that our safety responsibilities will disappear. In fact, they will continue to increase with the dissemination of many new technologies along with a greater number of patients using them. What it does mean is that new safety issues are appearing that are related to clinical-to-IT interfaces, non-matching systems, the lack of interface standards, and the introduction of wireless systems. If we are committed to the safe use of technology, these new safety issues will need (and do need) our close attention.

The cover story, which begins on page 345, features case studies of BMETs and CEs who have improved patient safety. In addition, this issue of *BI&T* includes an article that we authored on the legacy of CEs and BMETs. We have reviewed the history of both professions and have concluded that we are really safety specialists. We present our reasoning as to why the results of our maintenance programs have, since the 1970s, been inappropriately labeled. That is, the end point of all of our efforts has been to assure the safe use of technology and maintenance has simply been the vehicle that we used to achieve that goal. A better title for our efforts would have been Medical Equipment Safety Programs or Medical Equipment Risk Management Programs.

If you subscribe to our argument, you will see that a large mental change is certainly required! Like all cultural changes, this change will not be simple. We must change not just titles, but we must change the views taught in our educational programs, the attitudes of educators, course content and the certification body of knowledge, the attitudes of working CEs and BMETs, and the way we present ourselves to administrators and others. Maintenance will still be performed but its outcome, in every form presented, will have a safety emphasis. We strongly believe that history will record our legacy as safety-in-technology specialists. Do you agree?

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