

I've been thinking...



War, Inventors, Swim Fins, and The unSUMMIT for Bedside Barcoding October 2012

I've been thinking about war, inventors, swim fins, and The unSUMMIT for Bedside Barcoding.

The war the fathers of Tom Brokaw's *Greatest Generation Ever* fought was not "the war to end all wars" as Woodrow Wilson had anticipated. It was followed by another world war, which soon after we started numbering. Pray God we won't get to III.

After three years of fighting in America's Civil War, George Westinghouse enrolled in college. Within the year, he filed his first patent and dropped out. The prolific inventor went on to establish Westinghouse Electric and 60 other companies before he died in the spring of 1914 with 361 patents under his belt, a month before the U.S. entered the first World War.

Over the years, keen minds at Westinghouse research laboratories invented and refined materials and technologies, which would not only be used by U.S. military during WWI but also for decades to follow. It was Westinghouse ground radar that picked up Japan's planes en route to Pearl Harbor and many of the company's other eight thousand different products proved mission critical to the Allied victory in WWII.

In 1943, Westinghouse East Pittsburgh Works employed 21,000 workers dedicated to producing switchgear, turbines, motors, airborne radar systems and other war essentials. In an effort to minimize absenteeism, discourage labor strikes, and elevate worker morale, the company commissioned artist Howard Miller to create the now iconic wartime [poster](#) picturing a female worker rolling up her sleeves and affirming, "We can do it!"

While reading [Benjamin Franklin: An American Life](#) by Walter Isaacson and during an accidental visit last week to our nation's first post office (his invention), I've pondered several of the founding father's pithy sayings like, "There never was a good war or a bad peace." Who could argue?

In 1999, the landmark report from the Institutes of Medicine entitled [To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System](#) ignited another war—a war on drug errors. The report estimated that seven thousand patients died each year and another 1.5 million were harmed from preventable medication errors. How could we remain neutral?¹

Thankfully, a cadre of great companies researched and developed patient-safety technologies, not the least of which were bar-code medication administration (BCMA) systems. These technologies are proving invaluable for protecting America's patients. At the forefront of BCMA adoption marched the Veteran's Healthcare Administration. Today, the movement is turning into another *world* war, in which all countries entering the fray are allies on the side of patient safety and quality healthcare. I'm pretty sure Ben

¹ The full phrase is "To err is human, to forgive divine"—to which Franklin added, "to persist is devilish."

would have called this a good war.

A recent contribution to the battle against medication errors has come from the [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid](#) (CMS). Its *Final Rule for Stage 2 Meaningful Use (MU) Criteria* requires hospitals to “automatically track medications from order to administration using assistive technologies (such as radio frequency identification (RFID) or bar coding) in conjunction with an electronic medication administration record (eMAR).”²

This means BCMA is not only common sense but also a foolish-to-ignore practice. Complying with MU criteria is prerequisite for hospitals to receive ARRA funding now and avoid reimbursement penalties in the years to come.

Hospitals' bottom lines are important but no more than their patients.

The inaugural National Coordinator for Health Information, David Blumenthal, M.D., made it perfectly clear:

“Meaningful use, in the long-term, is when EHRs³ are used by health care providers to improve patient care, safety, and quality.”

And it's not just technology but *using technology well* that will get it done.

"By focusing on 'meaningful use,' we recognize that better health care does not come solely from the adoption of technology itself, but through the exchange and use of health information to best inform clinical decisions at the point of care."

We can and must use these meaningful technologies meaningfully.

The war of drug errors is an endless war, calling for tireless dedication and continual rolled up sleeves. Nothing advances the cause more than inventors, developers, manufacturers and users of the best technologies working together to refine products and identify best practices. Actually, that pretty much defines [The unSUMMIT for Bedside Barcoding](#), which will convene for its eighth year on April 22-24, 2013, in Orlando. I hope your hospitals and companies will rally the troops and join us.

I'm pretty sure that Ben, whose inventions range from urinary catheters to swim fins (not to mention bifocals and lightning rods) would have dug bar coding at the point of care.

In this greatest-technology generation ever we're fighting a good fight.

Otherwise peace,

What do you think?



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² Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services: 42 CFR Parts 412, 413, and 495

³ Electronic health records