

# Easing the pain of prescription processing



The UK's National Health Service (NHS) agencies responsible for processing prescriptions face a monumental processing task. Doctors issue more than one hundred million prescriptions annually to patients across the UK, and this figure will rise as changes in doctors' contracts focus on quality of patient care and recovery rates, rather than number of patients seen. The agencies are implementing new technology in order to process prescriptions and reimburse dispensing pharmacists more quickly, and provide more accurate management information to aid NHS planning and decision making.

## Scottish innovation

In June 2004 NHS National Services Scotland installed a BancTec solution, enabling them to more effectively process 42 million prescription forms and 78 million drug items annually. They needed a reliable, high volume prescription processing solution with the capacity to satisfy additional, future requirements. The solution incorporates 3 IBML ImageTrac scanners for use at their scanning centre in Livingston.

## Managing the load

NHS National Services Scotland receives around 3.5 million prescriptions monthly from 1,150 Scottish pharmacies and 300 dispensing practices. These prescriptions include 6.5 million drug items valued at around £75 million per month. Batches of prescriptions will be prepared for scanning, and then captured using high-speed scanners. Images of each prescription will be generated, and ICR software will extract key data from fields on the prescription form (patient name, doctor's details, drugs and dosage prescribed etc).

Prescription images will be distributed electronically to 400 operators at 3 keying sites, who will verify extracted data and complete missing information. The prescription image and data file will be returned to a

central server, where prescriptions will be automatically priced. Rejected items will be routed electronically to senior operators for further processing.

## Reliability up, costs down

BancTec's solution requires far less document preparation, enabling 40% of preparation staff to be redeployed. Increased scanning reliability will minimise downtime, and superior image quality will enable more accurate ICR.

According to Geoff Smith, Assistant Director, Pharmacy at NHS National Services Scotland, "We evaluated a wide range of alternative solutions and realised that few suppliers can handle the high-volume scanning requirements of our prescription processing application. The IBML technology leads in this field." Referring to BancTec's existing implementations at England's Prescription Pricing Authority and Health Solution Wales, Smith continues: "We selected BancTec's solution because they have an impressive track record of delivering prescription processing solutions based on this platform."

## Cornerstone for future development

Commenting on the future, Stuart Bain, Chief Executive at NHS National Services Scotland, said "In addition to catering for our existing document processing volumes, BancTec's solution has additional capacity that will stand us in good stead as we experience changes in operational requirements. Not only will it handle increases in prescription numbers resulting from the forthcoming new contracts for doctors, it will support our plans for the future, which include capturing documentation relating to dental and ophthalmic procedures, and scanning patient registration forms."

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