GS1 Healthcare Position Statement on GS1 DataMatrix Implementation

To meet the growing demands of increased data needs and facilitate increased patient safety, the healthcare community is in the position to be the leader in GS1 DataMatrix implementation. To demonstrate support of this leadership position, the GS1 Healthcare community has set a goal of 2015 for implementation of GS1 DataMatrix printing on, and scanning of, Regulated Healthcare Trade Items where the current needs are not being met by other GS1 Data Carriers. While not a binding mandate, the community feels strongly in setting a clear direction to further galvanize the industry and encourage action over and above the many active implementations that exist today.

Global standards for automatic identification provide an opportunity to make the healthcare supply chain safer as well as more efficient and accurate. Healthcare regulators and trading partners have realized that a global, standardized identification system from product manufacture to patient treatment is imperative to comply with the increasing need for product traceability around the world.

The GS1 System, globally endorsed by the healthcare community, is the most widely used trade item identification system worldwide with more than 5 billion transactions per day. Built on a foundation of identification keys (such as the Global Trade Item Number or GTIN) and attributes (such as batch/lot numbers, expiry date, etc.) it is uniquely suited to meet the needs of the global healthcare industry.

Pharmaceutical and medical device identification & marking have very specific needs, including:
• Encoding large amounts of variable or dynamic data (lot number, expiration date, serial number, etc.) at high production speeds
• Direct part marking (e.g. marking on surgical instruments, etc.)
• Efficient marking of irregular packaging for many medical products
• Global legal and regulatory requirements that dictate the placement of data in a bar code symbol
• Traceability requirements for both pharmaceuticals and medical devices

Some of these needs are being met, and will continue to be met, through the use of 'traditional' linear bar codes, such as GS1-128 or GS1 DataBar. However, for applications where they are not, GS1 Healthcare has adopted the use of GS1 DataMatrix as the data carrier (bar code symbol) solution.

GS1 DataMatrix is a 2-dimensional (2D) bar code symbology that efficiently meets all of the above needs by:
• **Allowing the encoding and marking** of a greater amount of data within a smaller space
• **Enabling direct part marking** of trade items where labels may not be practical (small medical / surgical instruments)
• **Providing error detection and correction** capabilities to improve the readability of bar codes despite irregular packaging or physical damage to a label

As with the implementation of any forward looking technology, there can be challenges that must be recognized. For GS1 DataMatrix, these could include:
• Upgrades to scanner systems: to read the GS1 DataMatrix symbology, camera-based bar code scanners are required. Linear technology based bar code scanners cannot read 2D bar codes, however camera-based bar code scanners can read both linear as well as 2D bar codes and users should be prepared to see both of these types of bar code symbols (see the GS1 Healthcare position statement on 2D camera based scanners)
• Updates to printing systems: to print GS1 DataMatrix, particularly on-line, direct to packaging, within production environments, printing systems may need software / hardware updates or replacement
• Updates to IT infrastructure systems: to ensure that dynamic, variable attribute data (lot/batch, expiry, serial number, etc.) is available for encoding in a "real time" packaging environment as well as ensuring that the underlying systems can support the additional data where this is not already implemented

Recognizing all of these needs, as well as the potential challenges of implementation, GS1 Healthcare and its global members strongly support the implementation of 2D capable scanners and the adoption of GS1 DataMatrix. A global implementation will not be accomplished without time and effort. The use of the GS1 DataMatrix can facilitate increased automation of data capture in any country without creating trade barriers that could otherwise potentially impact patient care and safety.

Where GS1 DataMatrix can enhance or solve data capture issues, we need to begin or expand implementations and ensure that the infrastructure is in place as we move to the use of 2D Symbols (like GS1 DataMatrix) through the investment in 2D capable scanners. To bring awareness to the industry of the need to consider these practical challenges and to move forward as quickly as practical, GS1 Healthcare urges that new investments in printing and scanning systems throughout the global healthcare market include compliancy to GS1 DataMatrix.

About GS1 Healthcare

GS1 Healthcare is a global, voluntary user community bringing together all Healthcare supply chain stakeholders, including manufacturers, distributors, Healthcare providers, solution providers, regulatory bodies and industry associations. The mission of GS1 Healthcare is to lead the Healthcare sector to the successful development and implementation of global standards by bringing together experts in Healthcare to enhance patient safety and supply chain efficiencies.

GS1 Healthcare members include over 60 leading Healthcare organisations worldwide. For more information about GS1 Healthcare, and to view this paper please visit www.gs1.org/healthcare.