

# Manufacturers Move to Help Hospitals Comply With Joint Commission Requirements on Clinical Alarms

Jill Schlabig Williams

In January 2003, new Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organization (JCAHO) requirements took effect. One goal in particular affected medical equipment managers – Patient Safety Goal Six, “Improve the Effectiveness of Clinical Alarm Systems.”

The requirement is designed to ensure that nurses and other caregivers can hear critical alarms at times of device malfunction or patient emergency. In the last issue of *BI&T*, we examined how hospitals have responded to the new requirement.

This article looks at products that manufacturers are marketing to help hospitals address the alarms requirement.

Hospitals across the country have been scrambling to understand and comply with the new requirements related to clinical alarms. A number of medical device manufacturers are eager to help in these efforts.

One company is currently working with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to obtain permission to market one of its devices as a solution to the equipment integration riddle.

Curbell Electronics, based in Orchard Park, NY, manufactures parts and accessories for nurse call

systems, healthcare beds, televisions and fall management products. They are currently exploring an adapter that is capable of interfacing different medical devices into a nurse call system.

“When the Joint Commission

**“The requirement is designed to ensure that nurses and other caregivers can hear critical alarms at times of device malfunction or patient emergency.”**

requirement was announced, we thought we had a solution for hooking medical devices into nurse call systems,” says Jeni Becker, marketing supervisor for Curbell. The company surveyed its customers,

and many of them expressed interest in using a Curbell manufactured adapter to integrate multiple devices. “Based on customer requests, we are in the process of working with the FDA for permission to market this product.”

Remote alarm systems have become an important solution to audibility problems that hospitals discover in the course of complying with the alarms requirement. Michael Merwine of In Focus Technologies, Inc. of Allentown, PA, reports increased interest in the remote alarm system his company offers.

“We are getting a lot of calls from hospitals on our product,” he says. “It offers a reliable, simple, flexible solution to the problem of ensuring that alarms can be heard.”



*In Focus Technologies' remote alarm system.*



*This sample Curbell adaptor may be used in conjunction with nurse call and medical devices.*

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## THE FIELD REPORT

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The In Focus Technologies remote alarm system relies on a noise sensor that is fastened within 2 inches of the audible alarm on the monitored piece of equipment (no direct connection required).

The sensor is adjusted to “hear” only the alarm signal. When triggered, the sensor sends an output to a host DPX-M time delay controller, which can be adjusted to absorb minor nuisance alarms.

This controller then provides 2 outputs – one can plug into a nurse call system, and one powers a remote buzzer. The buzzer can be attached to a hallway ceiling grid, a door frame or corridor light to create a portable alarm enhancement and extension system. This flexible system can be customized to meet a particular hospital’s requirements. “We have probably designed 75 different configurations,” reports Merwine.

Another company — Phoenix Data Systems, Inc., of Southfield,



Clinical Dynamics Corporation's SmartArm NIBP Simulator and SmartSat SpO2 Analyzer allows testing of alarms on blood pressure and pulse oximetry monitors.

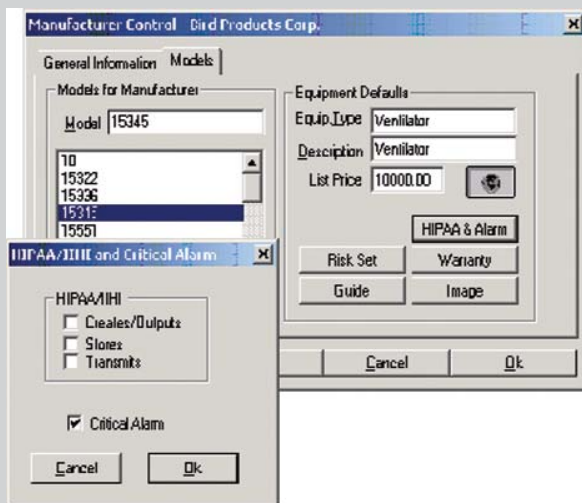
MI — offers comprehensive maintenance management software for hospitals and large hospital systems. The software allows equipment managers to track information such as equipment history, manufacturer and model-specific details, and contract details.

They recently added a function that helps equipment managers maintain an inventory of devices with alarms.

Phoenix’s Jason Saarela explains that when the new clinical alarms requirements were announced, the company added a function to the software to allow users to check off whether a device has a clinical alarm.

The system allows sorts, filters, and reports to be generated based on the alarms data. “Feedback from customers has prompted us to enhance clinical alarms with additional opportunities to designate the following: if the alarm can be silenced and if the alarm is central or local,” says Saarela.

Sometimes, existing devices have taken on a new importance in light of the clinical alarms testing requirement. Clinical Dynamics Corporation of Wallingford, CT, offers devices that can be used to test clinical alarms on blood pressure and pulse oximetry monitors. “We have worked with the manufacturers to incorporate auto-sequences into our SmartArm NIBP Simulator and SmartSat SpO2 Analyzer for testing blood pressure and pulse oximetry monitors,” says Clinical Dynamics’ Joseph R. Rebot.



Phoenix Data Systems' AIMS equipment management software offers equipment managers a way to maintain an inventory of devices with alarms.