United States Army Awards Contract to 3M for Pilot RFID Program To Track and Manage Medical Records at Fort Hood

3M has been awarded a $3.76 million contract to develop and install a system that uses radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to track medical files at the U.S. Army's massive Fort Hood Installation in Texas. The system is expected to make a positive impact on operational efficiencies in health care delivery, the troop deployment process and the management of medical data collection.

The active medical records of more than 150,000 servicemen and women and their dependents are housed at five sites at Fort Hood, and as many as 70,000 files may be in use at the base's six clinics during the course of a month. The RFID system is intended to substantially reduce errors and inefficiencies associated with manual tracking, retrieval, filing and file merging methods.

The tracking of Army medical records through RFID technology is an innovation led by the Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC), a unit of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (USAMRMC). Fort Hood, situated about 60 miles north of Austin, the state capital, is the nation's largest active duty domestic military installation, occupying some 340 square miles.

The Army becomes the third federal entity to employ RFID systems from 3M, following similar decisions recently by the Tax Division of the Department of Justice and the U.S. Tax Court. Unlike the other applications, however, the system in development for the Army requires higher-performance capability and a greater degree of continuous and automatic tracking of the files.

"The system is designed to provide continuous automatic inventory monitoring and automatic error notification; and, essentially, eliminate human compliance issues," says David Erickson, 3M program manager and principal investigator for the project.

He adds, "Recognition of RFID as a means of improving file management is growing rapidly, both within and outside of government. We're gratified to have this opportunity to demonstrate the potential productivity and efficiency boost our system brings to the management of medical records. Problems in this area not only can waste time and money, but, more important, can adversely affect the delivery of medical services and the timely deployment of personnel to their assignments to other parts of the world."

According to Erickson, the Fort Hood contract spans a period of three years. It covers the tasks of choosing and optimizing the best radio-frequency technology for this application, developing a cost-effective system that includes shelf-based reading capabilities and specialized software tailored specifically to meet the military's processes, and the installation and training of personnel for its use and maintenance.

RFID, often cited as an evolving technology for tracking product inventory, uses a microchip and tiny antenna implanted in a tag, which is attached to an object in much the same way as a barcode. A major difference, however, is that an RFID tag transmits its information to a tracking device using radio waves and, therefore, no line of sight is required between the tag and the tracker. For many applications, RFID is easier to use, more accurate and more cost effective than other inventory tracking systems.

What is less widely recognized is that RFID already has been in use for selective applications for nearly a decade. For example, 3M, as a pioneer in this technology, introduced RFID for libraries as a means of identifying, tracking and securing hundreds of thousands of books and periodicals commonly housed in public

and academic library systems.

More recently, 3M developed specialized RFID systems for tracking the case files that are vital to the operation of law practices, financial services firms, government agencies and providers of medical services.

For more information, call 1 (800) 944-3512.

For more than 30 years, 3M has provided premier security solutions and services that identify, authenticate, secure and track materials and information by combining security and productivity. Drawing on its broad technology base and expertise, 3M creates solutions for a wide array of security needs. Examples include issuance and authentication of travel documents and personal identification cards; brand and asset protection solutions to fight counterfeiting and tampering; file tracking solutions; and library security and workflow management solutions.

(Note: This project is sponsored by the Department of the Army under Award W81XWH-06-1-0223. Awarding and administering office: United States Army Medical Research Acquisition Activity, 820 Chandler St., Fort Detrick, MD 21702-5014. The information contained herein does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the government and no official endorsement should be inferred.)

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