

**RFID technology can help save lives in health-care sector
– *and* preserve privacy: Commissioner Cavoukian and HP**

Wide-sweeping developments – including potentially life-saving uses – in Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for the health sector have been advancing in lock-step with concerns about the privacy implications of deploying this nascent “auto-ID” information technology.

Today, Ontario Information and Privacy Commissioner Ann Cavoukian, Ph.D., in collaboration with Hewlett Packard (HP) Canada, released a joint whitepaper, [*RFID and Privacy: Guidance for Health-Care Providers*](#), which is aimed at cutting through the mists of uncertainty over the potential application of RFID technology in the health sector and the privacy implications of its uses.

In the U.S., for example, some health-care providers are already using RFID-based systems to track equipment, instruments and sponges used in surgery to ensure that nothing is left behind inside a patient. And some health-care providers are already using RFID-enabled labels to track specimens and laboratory results to ensure that they are not misplaced, as well as tracing pharmaceutical products to ensure that the correct medication and dosage is being administered. More than 400 U.S. hospitals are currently using RFID-based, baby-and-mother matching systems to prevent mix-ups and abductions – the RFID system triggers a lock-down if an infant is removed from a secured area without authorization.

“Everyone from health-care providers, to patients, to privacy advocates, want the best tracking technology possible in the health sector, without the needless invasion of privacy,” said Commissioner Cavoukian. “This can easily be achieved and become a positive-sum ‘win-win’ model for everyone (not a zero-sum scenario).”

“The objective of our joint paper,” said the Commissioner, “is to assist health-care providers in understanding the current and potential applications of RFID technology, the potential benefits, the information privacy implications associated with its uses, and the steps that may be taken to mitigate any potential privacy risks.”

“Today, the health-care sector is poised to reap the benefits of RFID technology, making a considerable difference to patient care. RFID can save lives – it is as simple as that,” said Victor Garcia, Chief Technology Officer for Hewlett-Packard Canada and co-author of the whitepaper. “The potential risks to privacy infringement can be recognized and addressed early on with governance guidelines and training, so that health-care providers

will be able to take full advantage of RFID innovations. This approach will take patient care to a whole new level.”

The joint paper, *RFID and Privacy: Guidance for Health-Care Providers*, examines a wide variety of RFID applications for the health-care sector, organizing them into three broad categories according to the increasing level of potential risk to privacy: RFID technology to track *things* alone; RFID technology to track *things associated with people*; and RFID technology to track *people*.

Both the Commissioner and HP believe that this paper will serve as a benchmark reference source for health-care providers to realize the benefits of RFID adoption while ensuring respect for patient privacy and a credible program of responsible information governance.

The paper is available at www.ipc.on.ca.

About the IPC

The Information and Privacy Commissioner is appointed by and reports to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and is independent of the government of the day. The Commissioner's mandate includes overseeing the access and privacy provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, as well as the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*, and helping to educate the public about access and privacy issues.

About HP

HP focuses on simplifying technology experiences for all of its customers – from individual consumers to the largest businesses. With a portfolio that spans printing, personal computing, software, services and IT infrastructure, HP is among the world's largest IT companies, with revenue totaling \$104.3 billion for the four fiscal quarters ended October 31, 2007. More information about HP (NYSE: HPQ) is available at <http://www.hp.com>.

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