

## GS1 barcodes have made patients safer for 20 years

*GS1 Healthcare celebrates 20 years advancing healthcare digitalisation with barcode technology*

*The GS1 DataMatrix barcode is recommended or mandated in healthcare regulations across more than 70 countries*



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Twenty years ago, GS1 expanded barcode technology into healthcare, revolutionising how medical products are tracked and identified and extending its use to standardise the identification of patients, locations, assets, and more. Originally launched in the retail sector in the 1970s, the barcode has simplified processes and enhanced efficiency across the healthcare industry.

GS1 barcodes have become indispensable in global healthcare supply chains. From giving time back to patient care by streamlining inventory management, to enabling unique identification of medicines and medical devices, these barcodes, and the global standards behind them, have laid the foundations for safer, smarter care.

“The journey of barcodes in healthcare began when regulators sought a reliable and smart way to identify and track medical products. GS1 provided the right technology—an innovation as simple as a barcode scan,” said **Renaud de Barbuat, President and CEO of GS1**. “Over the past two decades, GS1 barcodes have transformed healthcare systems, creating a ripple effect that ultimately benefits patients worldwide.”

Regulators rely on GS1 standards to ensure globally harmonised traceability of medical products. Today, the GS1 DataMatrix barcode is recommended or mandated in healthcare regulations across more than 70 countries. With over 16.5 billion medicine packs in the U.S. and EU alone carrying GS1 DataMatrix barcodes annually, the system has become a cornerstone of global healthcare.

### **Making patients safer every day**

Barcodes in healthcare are making a difference for millions globally. In the UK for instance, a report commissioned by the Scan4safety initiative found that the use of GS1 barcodes led to a 76% reduction in medical errors, eliminating mistakes related to the wrong patient, drug, or dosage.

Scanning GS1 DataMatrix barcodes allows healthcare professionals to verify the correct medication, dose, and patient in real time. In operating rooms, barcodes help track surgical instruments so all tools are sterilised and accounted for before and after surgery, reducing risks for patients.

"For two decades, GS1 barcodes have been an indispensable guardian of patient safety", said **Susan Moffatt-Bruce (MD), President of Lahey Hospital Medical Centre (US)**. "By powering the efficient sharing of data, barcodes help healthcare providers make informed decisions that prevent errors and improve care".

Additionally, GS1 barcodes support fighting counterfeit medicines. The WHO (World Health Organization) estimates that 1 in 10 medicines globally are substandard or falsified. GS1 barcodes ensure that medicines can be tracked and traced at every stage—from manufacturer to patient—making it easier to detect fake drugs or to report adverse events swiftly across the world.

### **The future of safer, smarter care**

GS1 Healthcare looks to the future with a clear mission: to make safer, smarter care accessible to everyone, everywhere.

GS1 is working with leading global technology companies to ensure barcodes on medical products can be scanned by patients with their smartphones, giving instant access to critical information about treatments—all in one simple scan.

"For over a decade, we've been using GS1 barcodes to help us share patient data to enable digital innovation in the Australian healthcare system. I imagine a world in the future where all data can move seamlessly from point A to point B without any manual intervention", said **Peter**

## **O'Halloran, Chief Digital Officer for the Australian Digital Health Agency.**

### **A Call to Action**

This 20-year milestone is both a celebration and a call to action, inviting healthcare stakeholders to join GS1 in building safer, smarter care for everyone, everywhere.

### **About GS1**

GS1 is a neutral, not-for-profit organisation that is best known for the barcode, named by the BBC as one of "the 50 things that made the world economy." GS1 standards improve the efficiency, safety and visibility of supply chains across physical and digital channels in 25 sectors. We enable organisations to identify, capture and share information seamlessly. Our scale and reach – local Member Organisations in 118 countries, more than 2 million user companies and 10 billion transactions every day –ensure that GS1 standards create a common language that supports systems and processes across the globe. Find out more at [www.gs1.org](http://www.gs1.org).

### **About GS1 Healthcare**

GS1 Healthcare is a neutral and open community bringing together key healthcare stakeholders to develop and implement global standards. The development and implementation of GS1 standards is led by its users, a global community of pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, group purchasing organisations, hospitals, pharmacies, logistics providers, solution providers, governmental and regulatory bodies, and trade associations. This collaborative network, nurtured by trust and alignment, has been essential for the adoption of GS1 standards in healthcare. [Members of GS1 Healthcare](#) include more than 150 leading healthcare organisations worldwide.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.gs1.org/industries/healthcare/gs1-healthcare-20th-anniversary>

### **GS1 media contact**

Carlos Carnicero Urabayen

[carlos.carnicero@gs1.org](mailto:carlos.carnicero@gs1.org)

+32 (0) 2788 7891

