Home Medical Devices Bring New Challenges

The increasing use of home healthcare is posing new challenges and opportunities for biomeds who in many cases are responsible for servicing and maintaining the equipment, experts say.

Speaking to attendees at AAMI’s 2009 Annual Conference, the experts noted that many factors have led to more patients receiving care at home. “More and more people are receiving care at home because of the cost and wanting to live independently, and hospitals are discharging people more quickly,” said Mary Weick-Brady, senior policy analyst and chair of the home-care committee for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Center for Devices and Radiological Health.

An aging population is also increasing the demand for home care and medical technology that comes with it. As a result, home medical devices need to address risks unique to the home, such as pets or children, Brady said.

FDA is working to address home medical devices. For example, the agency is looking into standardizing labeling for home use devices.

Some emerging home use technologies include the use of nanotechnology, wireless systems, and health informatics such as electronic health records. When implementing these new technologies there are some issues to consider, such as whether Medicare and other insurance bodies are willing to reimburse expenses, she said.

Biomed’s Role

Biomed departments in hospitals can play a vital role in homecare by servicing and maintaining the equipment. Representatives from Rady’s Children’s Hospital in San Diego, CA, discussed how the hospital’s biomed department assumed responsibility for equipment maintenance for the facility’s homecare department in 2005.

The department added an equipment specialist onsite, who gets support from biomed technicians, and a preventive maintenance coordinator to maintain and service the homecare department’s more than 500 pieces of equipment. The addition of biomed services has greatly impacted the department, noted Nestor Damasco, biomed and homecare equipment coordinator. “The turnaround time for equipment repair is an hour to a day. An outside agency took two weeks,” he said.

The program also created more than $160,000 in savings in the first year alone, Damasco said. The savings, for example, came from the elimination of use of rental companies, a reduction in repair costs, and a decrease in the amount of lost equipment.