

# Leading Children's Hospital Improves Mail Processing Productivity



For more than 100 years, Seattle Children's Hospital (SCH) has specialized in meeting the unique physical, emotional and developmental needs of children from infancy through young adulthood. SCH is a nonprofit privately held hospital and collaborates with providers in nearly 60 pediatric subspecialties to provide inpatient, outpatient, and emergency and outreach services – regardless of a family's ability to pay. It employs over 6,000 staff, with 1,200 working in its Research Institute. SCH serves Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho – the largest region of any children's hospital in the U.S. In 2016 U.S. News & World Report ranked Seattle Children's No. 5 in the nation for children's hospitals.

## Over 200 Envelopes Mailed Per Day

Seattle Children's Hospital delivers specialty care in partnership with the primary care providers (for example a doctor, speech therapist or physical therapist) of the patient. In order to support the collaboration or transition of care between the different facilities and primary care providers, SCH sends out correspondence and copies of medical records to the care providers, patients and families. These documents are sent via fax and the US postal service. SCH creates approximately 1,200 documents per day and approximately 250 of these are printed documents that are stuffed into envelopes and sent out by the postal service. We spoke to Paula Dascher, BS RHIA (Registered Health Information Administrator) Manager, Clinical Documentation and HIM (Health Information Management) Technology at Seattle Children's about how she and her team handle the documents that are mailed out by the postal service and why they chose Neopost to help them handle this more quickly and efficiently.

## Addressing and Stuffing Envelopes Manually

The medical records mailed out by SCH consist of operative and procedure reports, consultations, discharge summaries, clinic visit notes, laboratory result letters, care plans for schools, and physical/occupational/speech therapy notes. Mail is processed from Monday to Friday. Monday tends to be a particularly busy day as reports completed on Saturday and Sunday have to be processed.

Before investing in solutions from Neopost Paula and her team were printing all their reports on multiple laser printers.

Envelopes were printed with the addresses of the providers, but reports printed for patients, schools and some community providers had to be manually addressed. All printed reports had to be manually folded and stuffed into envelopes in order to be sent out by the US postal service. This process took eight hours per day to complete and was usually shared by two members of staff. Additionally, staff spent time dealing with undeliverable mail that was returned to SCH due to incorrect or incomplete addresses or expired forwarding address. This meant they were spending a lot of time checking for the right or new addresses and then sending out mail a second time. Furthermore when staff took time off, the hospital did not have sufficient resources to complete its mail process on a daily basis and often had to hire temporary staff to help out.

## The Need to Reduce Printing Costs

Paula started investigating into Neopost's capabilities when the hospital installed a multi-function printer in order to reduce printing costs associated with laser printers, in particular the cost of laser printer cartridges. The multifunction printer was very cost-effective to run but had a very small envelope feeder that could not be increased. The hospital's software could print the medical reports and a mailing envelope for the providers, but the envelope feeder had to be constantly re-filled. Secondly she was looking for a way to reduce the manual labor associated with the process of addressing envelopes and stuffing them with reports to be mailed out to patients, schools or other providers.

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## Business Document Management, Envelope Stuffing and Address Validation

Following a recommendation from their provider of leased printers and fax machines, Paula and her colleagues decided to look at the functionalities that could be provided by different mailing solutions from Neopost. They tried to determine what the return on investment would be and whether it would be cost effective to purchase different solutions versus the labor cost. They also looked at what capabilities Neopost had to offer against the cost of the solutions and the decision was taken to invest in output management software, a DS-75 folder inserter and address validation software. All 3 solutions were implemented at the same time. As these solutions were so appealing and their functionalities so clear, Paula didn't have any difficulty getting approval internally.

### Automated Mail Processing

All prior concerns Paula had about the process have been resolved as her team can now automate the mailing process of these medical reports. The software purchased from Neopost was customized in order to capture recipient information and prepare address pages. This allows the mail processing team to show an address through the window of an envelope instead of having to print on envelopes.

The business document software purchased from Neopost can accomplish the following tasks:

- Pull all medical reports into a Structured Query Language (SQL) database. This means that once the report of a patient's operation has been transcribed it is saved on a server. And when the output management software is activated it can grab that file and pull it into the database before printing it.
- Group documents by recipient.
- Create a barcoded recipient address page.
- Barcode the medical report pages going to each recipient.

The manual labor of folding the reports and stuffing the envelopes has been eliminated thanks to Neopost's DS-75 envelope stuffer which reads the barcodes, collates the pages of the medial reports that belong together, folds the pages, stuffs and seals the envelope.

### Address Validation Software

SCH however did not anticipate two additional benefits. As Paula explained: *"In addition to automating our previous workflow, we now leverage the address validation software that alerts us when a recipient's address is invalid or incomplete, such as if there is a missing suite number, apartment number, or directional (N, S, E, W). This allows us to correct the address before putting it in the mail,*

*which minimizes mail returned for incomplete addresses."*

The second benefit is the checking process for forwarding addresses. If the recipient has placed a forwarding address with the US postal service, Neopost's address validation software will update the address page for the recipient automatically. A report is generated to alert the hospital that there is a forwarding address so that they can update their patient registration system or provider database with the current address information.

### 88% Reduction in Manual Labor for Mail Operations

Since investing in these automated solutions from Neopost, Seattle Children's has noticed the following benefits:

- A reduction in labor hours - The hospital mails approximately 10,000 pieces per month. Done manually it would take 176 hours of labor to complete. Using the current Neopost automation reduces manual labor to 21.6 hours per month.
- A net time savings of labor of approximately 155 hours per month, which is an 88% reduction in labor.
- Improved ability to perform mail tasks when primary staff are out of office.
- Improved job satisfaction for employees doing this work.
- Ability to assign additional, high value tasks to existing staff
- Postage savings achieved from combining reports for the same recipient - automation allows SCH to process reports once a day which combines as many reports as possible in the same envelope.

As Paula explained: *"We were spending eight hours per day between two people manually addressing envelopes. Now the whole process takes less than an hour."* She went on to say: *"Neopost's software not only reduces the associated labor for our mail operations, but it also helps prevent the wrong patient information from being placed in the wrong envelope. As the pages are barcoded to match the address page of each recipient, the system stops if all of the barcodes don't match up or if the pages are not in the right order. This is an important safety element that can prevent the unintended disclosure of patient information to the wrong recipient."*



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### About Seattle Children's

Seattle Children's Hospital, Foundation and Research Institute together deliver superior patient care, advance new discoveries and treatments through pediatric research, and raise funds to create better futures for patients. Consistently ranked as one of the top 10 children's hospitals in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*, Seattle Children's Hospital specializes in meeting the unique physical, emotional and developmental needs of children from infancy through young adulthood. Through the collaboration of physicians in nearly 60 pediatric subspecialties, Seattle Children's Hospital provides inpatient, outpatient, diagnostic, surgical, rehabilitative, behavioral, and emergency and outreach services to families from around the world.

Located in downtown Seattle's biotech corridor, Seattle Children's Research Institute is pushing the boundaries of medical research to find cures for pediatric diseases and improve outcomes for children all over the world. Internationally recognized investigators and staff at the research institute are advancing new discoveries in cancer, genetics, immunology, pathology, infectious disease, injury prevention, bioethics and much more.

Seattle Children's Hospital and Research Foundation and Seattle Children's Hospital Guild Association work together to gather community support and raise funds for uncompensated care, clinical care and research. The foundation receives nearly 80,000 gifts each year, from lemonade stand proceeds to corporate sponsorships. Seattle Children's Hospital Guild Association is the largest all-volunteer fundraising network for any hospital in the country, serving as the umbrella organization for 450 groups of people who turn an activity they love into a fundraiser. Support from the foundation and guild association makes it possible for Seattle Children's care and research teams to improve the health and well-being of all kids.

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