

# Letter to the Editor

## The Heart of the Preventive Maintenance Debate: A Challenge to All Members of the HTM Community

I read the roundtable discussion in the March/April issue of *BI&T* titled "Getting to the Heart of the PM Debate" with keen interest and a considerable amount of frustration and sadness. I felt sadness because of our community's embarrassing predicament in taking so long to come to some kind of agreement on this extremely important issue. I have several articles in my files going back 20, 30, even 40 years with titles very close to this current one. And, as one of the roundtable participants pointed out, our collective professional community still has not managed to come to a reasonable agreement on the most simple questions: Why do we do preventive maintenance (PM)? What is its basic purpose?

Why am I getting impatient? The need to begin diverting the manpower and resources currently being expended on low-value or worthless PM activities to other technical activities that would really improve patient safety is agonizingly long overdue. A continuing waste of this magnitude (something close to half of the nation's expenditures on medical equipment maintenance) should be considered completely unacceptable.

So, here is my challenge to all of my peers in the healthcare technology management (HTM) community. I am going to post tentative answers to the four basic questions below as a document titled, HTMComDoc 15 on the HTM Community's database website ([www.HTMCommunityDB.org](http://www.HTMCommunityDB.org))\* and ask that each of you respond either by replying to this letter by e-mailing [htmc.mptf@gmail.com](mailto:htmc.mptf@gmail.com) stating that:

- a) You agree with all of the answers, or
- b) You agree with some, but not all of the answers (please specify which); or

- c) You agree with only a part of answer X and/or Y etc., (specify which); or
- d) You don't accept any of the answers.

Where you don't agree, it would be good if you would briefly state your objection(s) and offer appropriate recommended changes. And, if you choose the e-mail option, please include your name, title, affiliation, and location in your response.

The four questions are:

1. To what extent does performing PM on medical equipment improve patient safety?
2. Which devices can be made safer by periodic PM and which devices cannot be made any safer by periodic PM?
3. Why do we need to standardize the format of our maintenance reports?
4. Is there a simple metric that can be used to provide an indication of a device's documented level of reliability and PM-related safety?

\*Logging on to [www.HTMCommunityDB.org](http://www.HTMCommunityDB.org): After clicking the "here" link on the opening page, you will be able to see the main page. This is a password-protected wiki-type website so follow the instructions at the top of the main page to gain read-only access. When asked to log in, use "view" as your username and "view" as your password. Do not attempt to create an account. The rest of the material posted on the site also is tentative at this point. If you have the time and interest in reading any of it, please e-mail any comments you may have to the same address: [htmc.mptf@gmail.com](mailto:htmc.mptf@gmail.com).

*Malcolm G. Ridgway, PhD, CCE, FAIMBE  
Acting-Director, HTM Community Database  
Project*

