Leveraging ECRI’s Expertise: Vetting Non-Traditional Suppliers During Emergency Situations and the Recovery Phase

What the market tells us
Assessing non-traditional suppliers is necessary in day-to-day business, but becomes even more important in emergency situations. When inventories run low and are difficult to replenish through trusted vendors or through collaborations or donations, evaluating product availability or inventory levels with manufacturers can be a confusing process. But the thorough vetting of non-traditional suppliers is key to ensuring continuity in your supply chain and maintaining a high standard of staff and patient safety.

Recent experience with COVID-19 has shown purchasing PPE products and COVID-19 supplies from non-traditional suppliers, especially those outside the US, is a challenge for many providers. The lack of assurance that a supplier’s products are true functional equivalents and meet FDA guidelines impact a hospital’s decisions to buy. ECRI’s supply chain expertise and thorough supplier vetting process gives providers the assurance they need to help support their purchasing decisions.

Main Criteria for Non-Traditional Suppliers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional Equivalence</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDA Approval</td>
<td>79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td>30%</td>
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In a recent ECRI survey, hospitals indicated that functional equivalence as compared to traditional suppliers (72%) and FDA approval (79%) were the most critical criteria in sourcing PPE and other COVID-19 supplies from non-traditional suppliers. Country of origin was an important factor for 30% of respondents because of the need to mitigate risk by diversifying sourcing across multiple regions.

How we can help
ECRI’s provider partners view us as an extension of their supply chain, leveraging expertise and clinical evidence that provides the assurance to make informed, cost-effective purchasing decisions. So when critical PPE shortages caused hospitals to scramble for supplies, they looked to us for a solution. We moved quickly to provide a plan and criteria to help all providers quickly connect with reputable non-traditional suppliers. Our thorough vetting process, including assessing FDA manufacturer and product registrations, provided the right levels of insight and assurance. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each product category allowed providers to review important feature functionality - for example, information for N95 masks includes the testing results of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) for above or below 95% filtration. In addition, information on supplier website addresses, buying options, delivery terms, inventory levels and pricing is provided when available. This information, posted on ECRI’s COVID-19 Resource Center, is also a key resource in a collaboration between ECRI and AHRMM, with the goal to help providers vet non-traditional suppliers and provide assurance that they have been assessed by each organization.
In addition, ECRI’s provider partners are turning to us to test PPE supplies already received from non-traditional manufacturers but which have not gone through standard testing for use in the US. Our rigorous testing of an isolation gown for a prominent health system, performed in our in-house laboratory, determined the gown’s design and high water repellency made it comparable to conventional non-woven isolation gowns with an AAMI Level of at least 3. This enabled the hospital to augment their inventory with a product that will ensure staff and patient safety.

ECRI’s effort allowed providers to defer the work of vetting non-traditional suppliers to a trusted partner. By leveraging our supply chain expertise and thorough vetting process, we provided assurance to decision-makers about purchasing from non-traditional suppliers. As a result, hospitals faced with shortages can move forward quickly and with confidence in sourcing necessary supplies whenever needed.

What we recommend

Visit ECRI’s Resource Center for the latest information and life-saving resources pertaining to COVID-19.

Link to these resources:

- **Coronavirus Support Product Equivalents**: Best matches for the three most popular air clearance units, breathing circuits, disinfecting wipes, HME filters, IV solutions, and universal transfer media. Proprietary database includes manufacturer name, catalog number, percentage match, median price, and KPI details.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Supply Equivalents**: Best matches for the three most popular exam gloves, disinfecting wipes, face shields, isolation gowns, IV solutions, N95 air purifying respirators, shoe covers, surgical masks, and universal transport medium based on key performance indicators (KPIs) and functional equivalence. Proprietary database includes manufacturer name, catalog number, percentage match, median price, and KPI details.

- **ECRI is collaborating with The Association for Health Care Resource & Materials Management (AHRMM) to provide lists of non-traditional suppliers offering PPE supplies. In this collaboration, AHRMM is tracking non-traditional domestic suppliers and ECRI is tracking non-traditional international suppliers**. The combined effort and solution will help providers vet non-traditional suppliers and provide assurance that they have been assessed by each organization.

- **SARS-CoV-2 Test Kits**: This report includes a list of identified SARS-CoV-2 tests on the market with confirmation of availability and whether a supplier is accepting new customers.

Learn more: [www.ecri.org](http://www.ecri.org)

Contact us: [clientservices@ecri.org](mailto:clientservices@ecri.org)

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**About ECRI**

ECRI is an independent, nonprofit organization improving the safety, quality, and cost-effectiveness of care across all healthcare settings. With a focus on patient safety, evidence-based medicine, and health technology decision solutions, ECRI is the trusted expert for healthcare leaders and agencies worldwide. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is an ECRI affiliate. Visit ecri.org and follow @ECRI_Org.