



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

## Object 44: Barcode



### What is it?

A bar code is a way of recording data in a way that can be read by a machine. The bar codes used in pathology are much the same as those you see every day at the supermarket.

### History

The bar code was developed by American inventors Bernard Silver and Norman Woodland, who were trying to find a way to allow shops to follow movement of stock. The invention didn't make Silver and Woodland rich as they sold the patent in 1952 before the system was widely adopted. The first supermarket product identified by a barcode was a pack of Wrigley's chewing gum in Ohio.

### Pathology

If you've ever been in a hospital you're likely to have seen bar codes in use. Many hospital identity bracelets have a bar code so that patients can be matched to their test results. Blood samples and biopsies are labelled with bar codes to reduce identification errors. One of the most important uses is in blood transfusion – to ensure that patients receive the correct blood transfusion. Bar codes can also reduce medication errors.

### Find out more

Find out more about bar codes and have a go at making your own on the [More Than You Think website](#).

The history of the bar code is described by [The Telegraph](#).