



From cost center to value driver: Rethinking last-mile logistics

INTRODUCTION

As health systems and laboratories navigate another year of margin pressures and policy uncertainties, many leaders are reexamining long-standing operational assumptions and strategies.

One area ripe for reinvention is medical couriers, responsible for moving specimens, supplies, pharmaceuticals, and other critical items between healthcare facilities.

Historically treated as a tactical function, it is increasingly recognized as a strategic driver of cost control, clinical performance, and systemwide integration. **Four converging forces make reevaluating courier strategy both timely and essential for health systems and labs.**

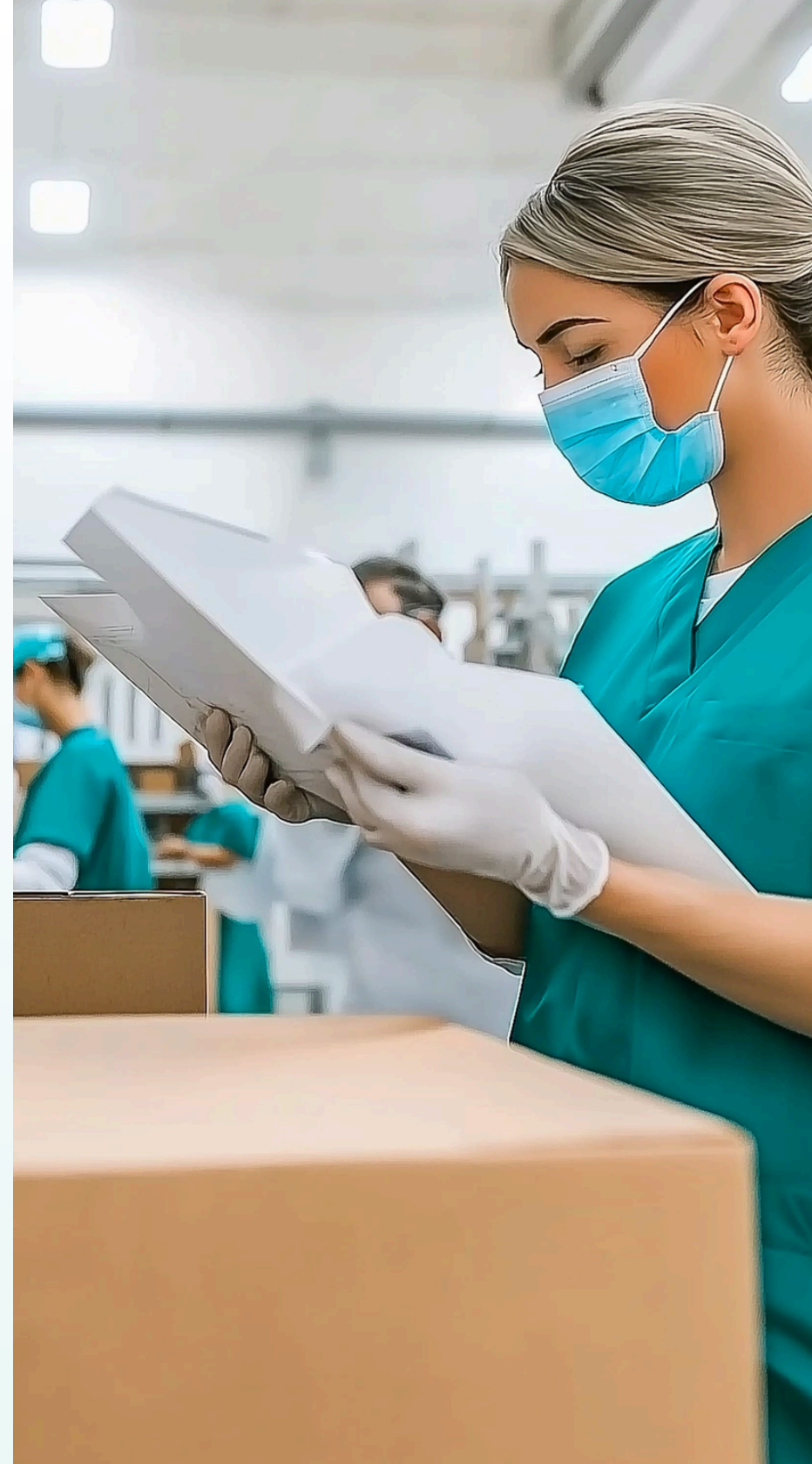


1. Cost pressures demand smarter logistics models that drive long-term value.

In healthcare, reducing the total cost of care is an ongoing imperative. However, sustainable performance depends on how efficiently resources are used across complex healthcare networks. When logistics operates in a silo, healthcare organizations incur avoidable expenses, from excess inventory and redundant ordering to increased disruption risks and overspending on functions that could be centralized. The result is waste that compounds across the system.

An effective last-mile logistics partner should play a direct role in shaping and enhancing asset utilization and workforce productivity while reducing waste, delays, and rework across the system. Logistics organizations operating W-2 employee models supported by healthcare-specific technology create more reliable operations through standardized processes, tighter chain-of-custody controls, and greater quality and reliability.

The benefits multiply when networks are built to serve as connecting agents with centralized, integrated hub-and-spoke models. This infrastructure enables health systems to share resources across the enterprise, such as pharmaceuticals, equipment, and routine supplies, to reduce excess inventory and increase supply chain resilience. Advanced capabilities such as cross-docking, reduced reliance on national carriers, and centralized functions (like print and mail) further drive efficiencies that scale with organizational growth.



2. Transparency is essential for financial and operational control.

It's critical to understand how the services healthcare organizations buy are being used and if they are delivering the expected value. This goes beyond reviewing invoices alone. Underperforming logistics can create hidden costs buried in budgets that permeate the entire system.

True clarity comes from real-time visibility into how networks and service levels are routinely used. When you invest time in analyzing what's really happening, it becomes easier to spot issues such as overlapping services, excessive on-demand requests, or underutilized routes.

Reaching this level of insight requires more than basic reports. It demands a logistics organization with AI-enabled, healthcare-specific technology and analytics that convert data into action. A strategic logistics partner continually reviews and refines your network, identifying ongoing opportunities to optimize routing and align service levels with actual clinical demand.



3. Logistics quality directly influences systemwide clinical and financial performance.

Courier performance sits directly in the path of care delivery, making quality nonnegotiable. Every episode of care depends, either indirectly or (most often) directly, on last-mile logistics. When specimens, supplies, or critical equipment arrive late, compromised, or not at all, the impact on care is immediate. A stark example: 54 percent of nurses report canceling procedures due to courier issues, costing an average of \$4,500 per incident.¹ This leads to delayed diagnoses, disrupted surgical schedules, and longer hospital stays, causing systemwide friction and slowing patient flow.

The financial impact extends well beyond a single event. Error remediation tied to specimen mishandling alone costs the average three- to four-hospital health system approximately \$1 million per year.¹ These failures consume clinical time, require repeat testing, and divert staff from patient care. Courier errors also negatively impact clinician productivity, patient experience, and expose organizations to reputational and legal risks.

Preventing these costs requires more than basic transportation. Healthcare organizations must prioritize logistics providers with specialized training, standardized operating procedures, strong management oversight, and advanced error-prevention technology. These elements collectively ensure consistent, high-quality service that enhances care delivery and minimizes avoidable costs.



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4. Effective post-merger integration hinges on a connected logistics backbone.

Health system mergers aim to create integrated organizations that improve clinical and financial performance. However, courier networks are often overlooked in integration efforts despite their critical role in connecting sites across the system.

Because last-mile logistics touches everything, it is one of the fastest and highest ROI levers for post-merger integration. A unified and well-designed last-mile logistics framework streamlines operations and fosters an efficient, enterprise-wide infrastructure. It also deepens clinical and operational integration. Consolidated laboratories, centralized sterilization, and shared pharmacy services can operate and scale more efficiently, delivering economic benefits that far exceed the cost of the logistics network itself.

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Transforming last-mile logistics for long-term success

The takeaway is clear: Last-mile logistics can no longer be viewed as a cost center but rather as a strategic value driver that can propel operational efficiency and enhance clinical outcomes. By embracing last-mile logistics as a form of shared infrastructure, health systems and labs can unlock the potential for sustained cost management, operational consistency, and long-term value creation in an increasingly complex and evolving landscape.

To learn more, email us at sales@medspeed.com.





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