

Straight Talk

A weekly update from management on the issues that matter most

August 26, 2010

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

“*Information*,” they say, “*is power*.” And nowhere is that truer than in healthcare, where the “*information*” we acquire and record about our patients gives us the “*power*” to heal and even save lives.

It’s no coincidence that information technology has become a top-level priority at NCH. In particular, our integrated medical record infrastructure enables us to link all healthcare providers—from the time a patient expresses medical concern through visiting a primary care physician, referral to a specialist, potential admission to the hospital, post-hospital care in a rehabilitation center or skilled care facility, to home care.

This robust, computerized information infrastructure allows us to determine best practices and establish treatment benchmarks. This is a quantum change from the standard paper analog record, where medical research about processes—such as the time needed to stop a heart attack—had to be calculated manually. With an Electronic Medical Record (EMR), all digital records can be analyzed in moments for any period of time. The data collected digitally becomes new knowledge about how best to care for patients and obtain the best outcomes. Here’s one example of the EMR in action:

- On a recent Saturday morning, I observed anesthesiologist Dr. **Michael Nolan** caring for a patient about to have urgent brain surgery. Dr. Nolan studied his new iPad, viewing the patient’s entire hospital record—including all medications, physician notes, lab data, vital signs—and then ordered the appropriate pre-op medications. Dr. Nolan could also add his own notes about findings and plan for anesthesia, by using either voice dictation or a typed template. That’s the real beauty of the EMR; it allows everyone caring for a patient, wherever they are, to securely access a patient’s history, medications, lab, allergies, even digitally-stored X-rays. EMRs will literally change the way we provide care.

One important motivator for moving to such cutting-edge technology is the recent Federal health care bill, which directs \$26 billion in electronic health records to hospital systems demonstrating “*meaningful use*” of digital technology. To qualify, hospitals must show results in 10 mandatory objectives, including computer provider order entry, problems lists, quality measures, medications, allergies, and other clinically important information.

Under the leadership of Chief Information Officer **Susan Wolff**, working with our IT partner Cerner, we plan to be an early applicant for these funds. Director of Reimbursement & Revenue Cycle Oversight **Sue Slaght** calculated NCH could receive about \$11.6 million for achieving “*meaningful use*.” Cerner tells us that among its over 130 hospital clients, NCH is second to only one other system in terms of such “*meaningful use*.” So we’re excited by the prospects and will apply to the Federal government next summer for the fund support.

Monetary rewards, though, are less important than results. Studies confirm that a fully functional EMR dramatically reduces Emergency Department lengths of stay and diagnosis/treatment time. This has been our experience at both Emergency Rooms, where EMRs have lowered door-to-doctor times. Drs. **Paul Dernbach**, **Mark Russo**, and **Sam Tunkle** are leading the way in their offices and in the hospital to have a common NCH medical record. We’re also working with the Foundation for Women’s Health on a common electronic medical record for their approximately 900 moms cared for in the county Department of Health building and The Birth Place at our North Naples campus. The EMR is the future of healthcare, and our patients will be the beneficiaries.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.