

Electronic Medical Records implemented at clinic

Written by Chris Lee



□□ Judy Sudmeier, FNP, pictured at right, and Family Practice office

director Melissa Mayden demonstrate what it looks like in exam rooms

now that the Electronic Medical Records have been implemented at

Family Practice of Holyoke. Staff will now enter patient information

on laptops instead of keeping charts on hand.□□—Enterprise photo

Hey, why is my nurse playing on the computer instead of taking a look at my swollen knee?

Those visiting Family Practice of Holyoke clinic this week may have noticed staff tapping away

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at a computer or hand-held electronic device while working with them. No, they aren't playing Solitaire or Hearts, they are utilizing the new Electronic Medical Records (EMR) that went live Tuesday, Aug. 10.

EMRs have been in the works for quite some time and now that the time has arrived, staff within the clinic and hospital are very excited to go live.

MMH administrator John Ayoub stressed the fact it will be the same people providing the same quality health care. There will just be a computer instead of charts.

The new system allows nurses and providers access to a patient's medical records at the click of a button. No more paper files being handed from person to person.

The program allows a nurse to visit with a patient, enter the information into the EMR, leave the room and work on something else. Meanwhile, in comes the doctor who can pull up the patient's information and see what the nurse just entered without ever coming in contact with them.

This process will allow the clinic and MMH to provide more efficient health care to patients, according to Ayoub.

People visiting the clinic should know appointments may take a little longer while the staff gets used to the system during the transition, according to Ayoub and clinic director Melissa Mayden.

Staff may also be asking patients more questions than usual. These, along with the appearance of a computer (laptop) in each room will be all that will be different when visiting the clinic.

One of the unique features allows prescription information to be instantly transferred to local pharmacies and even mail-in pharmacies. The E-prescribing eliminates fax machines between the pharmacy and clinic.

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“It will be faster and easier for people to get their medications,” Mayden said.

Mayden wants people to understand a back-up plan is in place in the event of a computer crash.

Everything is backed up multiple times a day so there is no need to worry. It will actually be safer now because if there was a fire at the hospital and the records room was involved, charts would be lost for good. “It’s not going to stop us if the computer goes down,” Mayden said.

The process to convert to the EMRs has taken some work. Employees have been busy conducting chart abstractions and scanning in documents. Ayoub explained a chart abstraction as the cliff notes of one’s medical record.

Mayden noted things such as medications, allergies and vital signs that will be abstracted. She also noted everything in a patient’s chart from within the last year or two will be scanned.

The charts will not be disposed of. Mayden said they will hold onto the charts for as long as required.

The product being implemented is through NextGen. Ayoub noted there are two parts of the NextGen system. The EMRs are the second part. The first part went live in March 2009 with behind-the-scenes items such as billing and scheduling and is called Electronic Practice Management software. With this newest program comes a lot of excitement.

Mayden said the system is certified by the likes of Medicare and Medicaid.

“There will be ups and downs, but we will get through them,” Mayden said. “We have a great staff. And we’ve been doing lots and lots of training.”

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Mayden noted staff spent much of July running through patient scenarios. These exercises helped staff get comfortable with the computers while interacting with “patients.” “I’m very confident they are comfortable with it,” Mayden added.

Another aspect of the system is public health and education. Say for instance a provider wanted to know how many asthmatics are in the area, the system will allow them to search for it and it will run a report with the requested information. This allows the clinic and hospital to better educate the public.

“It’s absolutely fascinating,” Ayoub said.