

Family Practice moving in right direction with new medical records

Written by Chris Lee

Technology is always changing—always progressing.

At Family Practice of Holyoke it's no different. Providers and staff members are in the process of learning a new system used to store patients' medical records.

The electronic medical records (EMRs) went live in 2010 within the clinic, and staff members have gradually become more comfortable with them.

David Ginsberg of the Colorado Rural Health Center (CRHC) said the clinic in Holyoke is well ahead of other facilities currently implementing electronic medical records.

Ginsberg, along with others from CRHC, were in Holyoke roughly a month ago conducting an assessment of the implemented health records while also looking into the implementation of EMRs within the hospital.

CRHC is in the process of working with Melissa Memorial Hospital (MMH) to implement its own electronic medical records.

Conclusions of the clinic assessment were positive and found things are moving in the right direction.

"We feel that was a very wise decision," Ginsberg said referring to the implementation of the electronic records. "We know there were some bumps in the process, but those are typical of early adoption and are clearly getting worked out now."

Ginsberg said the clinic has so much volume and activity, the implementation has and will continue to benefit providers and staff.

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Ginsberg said Family Practice is farther ahead than most and would rate it a seven on a scale of 10. "I would say the average right now is four," he added.

"I think (Family Practice) is on a pathway to get to 10 and it will get there. The difference is fine tuning."

Safety, protection and privacy are things on everyone's mind when dealing with technology and information. Ginsberg noted everything is completely secure. MMH administrator John Ayoub compared the security to that of online banking.

The CRHC is approaching its 20th year as the state agency for rural health in Colorado. The organization helps provide resources and services for rural health care providers who operate as small hospitals such as MMH or free-standing clinics or health clinics.

Resources include grant assistance and distribution of funds from the Health Resources Services Administration. Some of those funds help facilities like MMH initially become a critical access hospital, according to Ginsberg.

The resources provided help maintain the sustainability of rural health and improve workforce development.

Nearly seven years ago, management of CRHC became aware there was a need for support in the health information technology arena for rural health providers and began offering a variety of services to help providers.

In 2009, funds from the American Recovery Reinvestment Act (Stimulus Bill) helped create a Regional Extension Center (REC) through the state to provide technical assistance to primary care providers for the adoption and implementation of electronic medical records.

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CRHC became an REC contractor and works under a grant received by Colorado Regional Health Information Organization, which is the statewide designated health information exchange as well as the designated REC for the state.

In an effort to formalize their services, CRHC created THE (Technology in Health care Excellence) Consortium.

The group has helped with education and technical assistance to help organizations evaluate their readiness for health information technology. They also help organizations choose and prepare for different vendors for appropriate technology.

THE Consortium is the group working with MMH and Family Practice of Holyoke.