EISENHOWER GOES DIGITAL

Patient Safety is #1

Eisenhower Medical Center is nearly finished converting all patient records to electronic files. The 24-month, six-stage implementation process will be completed by late 2009. According to Eisenhower Vice President and Chief Information Officer David Perez, the new system is an important step in Eisenhower's ongoing commitment to patient safety and to providing the best patient care available today.

An "electronic medical record" is a complete patient medical file in a digital format. The files are maintained on a health care provider's secure, digital network, enabling medical teams to efficiently share information about a patient among multiple specialists and departments within an organization.

With electronic medical records, physicians can see a patient's entire medical history—including test results, diagnoses, past procedures, prescribed medications—with a simple computer keystroke. The digital records make it possible for all of an individual's doctors who are tied to the health care provider network to share the information in real time. The process greatly increases efficiency for the medical team and reduces frustration for patients, who often worry whether their doctors have complete and accurate information about them.

According to experts, one of the most valuable benefits of electronic medical records is the effect on patient safety. If there is complete documentation in one place, all caretakers have access to information on the entire continuum of care that a patient has received. As a result, medical risks—such as misdiagnoses or negative drug interactions—are significantly minimized because the records provide accurate, real-time data to the caretaker.

"Our goal is always patient safety. So, the new system provides a complete documentation of patient care, covering everything from the moment the patient checks in until they are discharged," Perez says. "All of the information, accessible by the complete medical team, is in a central electronic record which includes, but is not limited to, the patient history, nurse charting, test results, prescription medications, diagnostic images, allergies and physician progress notes."

The digital process begins with the creation of a patient's electronic record at admission to Eisenhower Medical Center or his or her initial registration for an appointment or outpatient procedure. The record is placed in a clinical data repository, an electronic network that links together the records of all of the medical departments at Eisenhower, as well as the ancillary systems such as labs, the radiology department, the rehabilitation center and the pharmacy. In addition, the Eisenhower Express Clinics in Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells, La Quinta and Cathedral City are also online.

As a result of this comprehensive integration, the record created for a patient at their first intake into the system follows a patient throughout Eisenhower, eliminating redundancies in testing and preventing conflicting therapies or treatment. For patients, this integration is key, since most patient cases involve multiple physicians and multiple departments. If for example, an Eisenhower cardiology patient is admitted to the emergency department with chest pain, the Emergency Department physicians can immediately review their previous electrocardiograms (EKGs) and blood tests. They will instantly know what drugs have been prescribed and can review records of any consults with other specialists, such as endocrinologists, who may have participated in the patient's care.

Perez says that once the data system is completely up and running (final phase to be implemented late 2009), a patient's file will include all hospital charts, physician notes, prescription records, imaging files (mammograms, MRIs, CT scans, etc.), referrals and consults. The system will also generate electronic patient safety alerts and reminders to notify providers of needed protocols, such as administering drugs or monitoring various vital signs.

"This technology initiative will fundamentally change our care processes by greatly reducing inefficiencies and enabling immediate access to relevant patient information," says G. Aubrey Serfling, Chief Executive Officer and President of Eisenhower Medical Center. "Our physicians and nurses will have more critical patient information as they need it, and this technology will improve the way clinicians work as a team by breaking down barriers between departments, disciplines and settings…. It is a critical step in the creation of high-quality health care and improved patient outcomes."

The software for the electronic records system at Eisenhower was created by McKesson Corporation, the nation's largest health care services company. McKesson provides a number of services to health care providers and insurance companies, including providing information technology for hospitals, physicians, homecare providers and insurance companies.

One of the key components McKesson developed to address Eisenhower's patient safety strategy is a centralized pharmacy information system that enables pharmacists to electronically receive, verify and send medication orders within the hospital. Also new is a medication administration system, which includes handheld, barcode scanning devices to prompt nurses to check that they are administering the right dose of the right drug to the right patient.

Although the records are accessible to the entire Eisenhower medical team, patient privacy is also of utmost importance, so all records are protected by a state-of-the-art security system.

Prior to the implementation of digital records, all of these materials would have been in physical files, with records in many different sizes and formats, taking up a significant amount of storage space. If a health care provider needed to review all of a patient's records, collecting and transporting them was expensive and time-consuming, potentially prolonging the wait for patient treatment. The use of electronic records facilitates not only recordkeeping, but also information sharing.

The central electronic system developed by McKesson is enhanced through Eisenhower's partnership with RelayHealth®, which was announced earlier this year. The RelayHealth system allows participating physician practices to have secure, easy online access to coordinated patient information, and gives patients online access to their doctor's office. Approximately 100 doctors affiliated with Eisenhower currently use the system as a central point to share test results with their patients, prescribe medications electronically and coordinate care with the other members of a patient's medical team. Some physicians also use an online evaluation called a "web visit" to determine the nature of a patient's health concern, and whether he or she needs to see a doctor.

Electronic medical records are the wave of the future, providing inherent cost savings, time savings, and most importantly, increased patient safety. Eisenhower Medical Center is strongly committed to providing excellence in health care, in the most healing and safe patient environment.

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