

New technology to help Frisbie make health care more efficient

By JOSH ROSENSON

jrosenson@fosters.com

Article Date: Monday, April 21, 2008

ROCHESTER — The Frisbie Memorial Hospital Emergency Department went "live" with an elaborate, new computerized patient tracking system on April 1, boasting many benefits for patients and staff, alike.

Frisbie is the second hospital in the Granite State to implement the MEDHOST software, joining the Cottage Hospital in Colebrook.

The ED now has a large flat-screen monitor and a dozen smaller monitors throughout the area with extensive capabilities, ranging from patient care to seeking outside help.

"The reason for this (is), in this day and age of making health care more efficient, and probably more importantly, getting ER patients seen faster," Chief of the ED Dr. Robert Anthony explained.

The MEDHOST system has the capability to perform several functions. Each patient is identified confidentially, Anthony said, and the monitors tell staff what room patients are in, if they are in a different department, like cardiology or x-ray rooms, and their status. The status of x-rays and lab tests also are indicated, whether they are ordered, in progress, ready to be viewed and if they have been read. A picture of a bone and a test tube next to each patient's name denote the progress of x-rays and lab tests, respectively.

A color-code is used to show which patients are assigned to which doctors.

"The status of everything that goes on with that patient is on the board," Anthony said.

From the screen, staff also is able to view the total time a patient has been in the department, how long since the patient's last interaction with staff and the urgency of care required by the patient, Anthony explained.

Furthermore, the system lets staff know when an ambulance is en route and can designate a bed in advance. It also cues housekeeping when bed sheets need to be changed.

"Every single piece of information is captured. It's all time stamped. It's all archived," Anthony said, and after about a month or two of data is gathered, the department will be able analyze wait times, discharge, admittance and the like, to figure out where and how to improve efficiency. "We are still learning and getting used to it. It has improved getting people to see doctors faster."

The smaller monitors have touch screens, which are password protected, offering a wide variety of services. The system shows which staff are in, who is on call and who is assigned to which patient, to name a few functions.

"(We) have a huge phone book (in the system) of anything we want," Anthony said. In the system's phone book, Anthony said anything needed to support an ER patient can be found, whether it's a number for Alcoholics Anonymous, Meals on Wheels or psychiatric help.

"It really has made the whole desk think a lot more efficient," said Ruth Henderson, the nurse manager for the ED. "It's easy as pie for them," Henderson said of the staffers, who are visual learners.

While the system itself isn't entirely new, it has been evolving during the last decade, and Frisbie looks to evolve with it into the future.

"The tracking itself has been available for the last 10 years," Henderson said, noting EDs have really began to embrace it in the last two to five years. "We do anticipate moving forward over the next couple of years," Henderson explained, with goals of expanding on the program and achieving full documentation. "I think in the next five to 10 years, you will see a lot of hospitals go this way."