Argus Courier – Hospital Add Remote ICU Monitoring

Published: Wednesday, Oct 24, 2007

HOSPITAL ADDS REMOTE ICU MONITORING

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Financial donors smiled proudly on Oct. 17 as they celebrated the completion of a new, electronic intensive care unit at Petaluma Valley Hospital.

Some 60 donors attended the event, in which tours were offered so that they could view CareWatch, a system in the intensive-care unit that enables a remote team of critical-care specialists to monitor patients around the clock and maintain close communications with bedside doctors and nurses. PVH is one of the first two facilities in the St. Joseph Health System to implement the system.

Terry Hankins
Top photo: Petaluma Valley Hospital nurse Courtney Barker works on the hospital's new computer on wheels in the intensive care unit. Bottom photo: Hospital radiology technician John Smirnoff operates the new state-of-the-art CT scanner.

"It was great to be able to show donors how their dollars were spent," said Pat Schaeffer, PVH's director of development and community relations. "They were thrilled. It's unusual for a hospital this size to have this type of modern equipment."

Remote ICU monitoring provides additional clinical support for physicians and enhances decision making about patient care. CareWatch allows a critical care team of physicians, nurses and ICU support staff members to continuously analyze trends in patients' vital signs, medications, lab results, X-rays and other clinical information.

The monitoring is particularly beneficial during hospital night-shift hours, when physicians might not be immediately available. The CareWatch system also gives ICU nurses the ability to alert remote ICU staff members to call a patient's doctor while the nurse remains at the bedside.

Hospitals with remote ICU monitoring report a 27 percent decrease in deaths, as well as shorter overall hospital stays and decreased costs.

"The ICU nursing staff is very excited to have this wonderful technology in place," said Nancy Corda, nurse manager of the unit. "We are now able to provide the highest level of care for our patients, with computerized monitoring and direct access to another layer of specialized clinicians to support bedside care."

The CareWatch system includes cameras and microphones mounted in ICU hospital rooms to allow visual and verbal communication between bedside and remote medical staff members. The cameras are turned on only for remote staff members to view patients for brief periods. Otherwise, they remain off, with their lens turned toward the wall.

Bedside physicians and nurses can activate a privacy indicator to prevent remote viewing as they attend to a patient's personal needs. The only time the remote facility can override the privacy indicator is when a sudden change occurs in a patient's condition.

Due to the wide variation in patients' needs, trauma physicians and remote intensive practitioners work together on a case-by-case basis to determine the level of monitoring necessary. A patient's doctor remains the final authority in all decisions, but remote intensive practitioners can give orders if bedside physicians aren't present.

The remote CareWatch facility for PVH is located in downtown San Francisco and is operated by Sutter Health Systems. Communications between the remote facility and both hospitals are transmitted over private, secure telephone lines, with data encryption. At the remote facility, only medical staff members have access to patient information.

During the tours, donors were able to communicate with the remote staff members, and observe how the system works.

Hundreds of community groups and individuals helped to fund CareWatch at PVH. Tellabs Corp., the Hillbolm Foundation, Gordon and Ann Blumenthal, Petaluma Valley Hospital Auxiliary, the Community Health Foundation of Greater Petaluma and Basin Street Properties played a major role in making the project possible.

During the Oct. 17 gathering, donors also viewed the hospital's new 64-slice CT scanner, the most progressive model available. It produces high-speed, high-resolution imaging, and can scan a patient — from the top of the head to the bottom of the pelvis — in about 15 seconds.

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