

El Camino Hospital

Source: Healthcare Digital

Date :26/07/2007 11:29:20

While most hospitals today are prescribing large doses of IT to improve patient care, El Camino Hospital has continued to pave the way

Written and produced by Megan Santosus & Thomas Venturo

While there's no quick fix to the complicated issue of rising health care costs, many people believe that hospitals can go a long way toward solving the problem if only they would apply technology that would make them more efficient. Consequently, being a pioneer user of information technology is something of a badge of honor that many hospitals want to lay claim to.

In the case of El Camino Hospital in Mountain View, Calif., being a pioneer in terms of IT isn't just wishful thinking; it's a fact.

Back in the 1970s, the hospital got together with space and defense contractor Lockheed Martin to create the very first computerized physician order entry system, or CPOE. With a CPOE, physicians and other authorized caregivers can enter prescriptions into a computerized device that goes directly to the hospital pharmacy system.

By taking handwriting out of the process, CPOEs eliminate both transcription errors and manual order entry, thereby improving care and efficiency at one time.

In the decades since its first CPOE, El Camino Hospital has continuously upgraded its system, even as other hospitals have yet to implement a CPOE.

"Many hospitals today still struggle with implementing their first CPOE," says Diana Russell, El Camino Hospital's vice president of patient care services and interim CIO.

An IT pioneer indeed.

When El Camino Hospital opened its doors as an independent community hospital in 1961, the surrounding area that would become the thriving Silicon Valley was still a few years in the future. And just as information technology has irrevocably shaped the Northern California landscape, so too has IT shaped El Camino Hospital.

For five years running, El Camino has been named one of the 100 "Most Wired" hospitals in the country by Hospitals & Health Networks Magazine.

In bestowing its "Most Wired" designation, the magazine singled out hospitals that use IT to make improvements in quality and patient care. Among the criteria that characterize the "Most Wired:" they conduct more evaluations of IT projects; they have made a significant commitment to paperless medical records; they provide digital imaging in a wide array of clinical disciplines; they offer more telemedicine services; and they provide more IT educational resources to staff members.

Specifically, El Camino Hospital has a robust wireless network that enables physicians to document and review clinical information right at the bedside with handheld devices.

In addition, the devices serve as a communication system that can connect two colleagues working on a case.

"It makes us more efficient in that we don't have to pick up the phone to communicate with the person or persons we're looking for," Russell says.

El Camino Hospital has also recently deployed a 3-D, high definition robotic surgical system in the operating room that can assist in certain surgical procedures, enabling a less - invasive approach. Russell says that studies indicate such devices contribute to better recovery times for patients.

Russell says that two factors have contributed to El Camino Hospital's commitment and readiness to implement IT. First, as an independent hospital (as opposed to a system hospital like most others in the surrounding area), El Camino Hospital enjoys local control as to what technology is deployed.

"We are more flexible than a large system hospital," Russell explains. "We don't require the time and energy required to get system - wide focus and consensus."

The other factor — not surprisingly — has to do with El Camino Hospital's location in the heart of Silicon Valley.

"The physicians, staff and patients all expect to use technology, and that encourages us to evaluate where technology might help us," says Russell.

With a track record of successful technology implementations, the staff is also receptive to trying new technology, so El Camino Hospital hasn't experienced much of the resistance to technology that sidetracks initiatives at other hospitals.

Despite its legacy as a technology-savvy organization, El Camino Hospital prides itself first and foremost on the quality of its medical care. El Camino Hospital is a not-for-profit organization with more than 800 physicians on staff. It has 395 licensed beds.

The hospital offers a full range of medical services including cardiac care, cancer care, radiation oncology, dialysis, behavioral health and maternity. In addition to its reputation as an IT innovator, El Camino Hospital has earned numerous accolades and awards over the years.

From 2005 to 2007, El Camino Hospital was ranked among the top 5% of hospitals nationwide in clinical performance. In addition, the credentialing arm of the American Nursing Association has designated El Camino Hospital a Magnet Hospital, recognizing the excellent professional environment for nurses.

El Camino Hospital is among the 3% of hospitals around the country to receive this recognition, Russell says.

"It's no surprise that we have low turnover and a low vacancy rate for open RN positions," she adds.

More important, says Russell, is that low turnover means that El Camino Hospital's nursing staff is experienced, and nurses have the ability to practice what they want and contribute to decision-making.

"This really contributes to the quality of our care," she says.

In 2009, El Camino Hospital will move into a new main building that meets California's earthquake building codes and that will enable the hospital to pioneer new approaches to patient comfort, convenience and safety. Among the new features: private rooms with family-friendly accommodations and flexible operating rooms that can be used for a variety of procedures.

Russell says that the operating rooms are designed to accommodate equipment that doesn't exist yet; in incorporating future technologies into the design, El Camino Hospital can deploy technologies when ready rather than when the physical environment dictates.

Downloaded from:

https://web.archive.org/web/20080830084151/http://www.execdigital.com/El-Camino-Hospital_1320.aspx

June 18, 2025