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Addressing Patient Education Concerns

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Patient education is important to any quality health care facility. Ensuring that patients understand a diagnosis and condition, including symptoms, medications and care procedures that must be continued following discharge, can be a difficult task for nurses and physicians. Patients often forget verbal instructions and lose or don't understand written pages. Language barriers exist, as do attention barriers.

North Hills Hospital, a 176-bed facility in North Richland Hills, Texas, wanted to ensure that its patients have a complete understanding of their conditions. The facility believes that better informed patients are less likely to be re-admitted for avoidable issues. The hospital also wanted to prevent its patients from seeking information online that may not be correct or from a reputable source.

The hospital recognized that its staff of more than 1,000, including nurses and 400-plus physicians, were extremely busy and often provide information verbally to patients when they are available, which may not be the best time for the patient. Additionally, multiple departments and specialized services such as a Pediatric Surgery Center, Cardiovascular Service Center and newly opened Women's Center, made it particularly challenging to maintain a set standard of quality education. North Hills sought a solution that would allow its staff to provide top-quality education to patients without putting additional stress on their workloads.

Finding a solution

Numerous studies have shown video to be an effective medium for relaying information. Videos work especially well in the hospital environment, as TeleHealth Services has found through its popular TIGR video education system.

Sally Carmen, North Hills Hospital's education director, learned of TeleHealth Services' TIGR interactive patient education system through another client, Clear Lake Regional Hospital in Webster, Texas. After discussing a custom solution with TeleHealth, North Hills decided to implement the system. The TIGR system debuted at North Hills on March 18, 2009. As with any new technology implementation, staff buy-in was imperative to the project's success. North Hills created a TIGR project group to educate the staff on the benefits of using TIGR for patient education. They created brochures touting the offerings of the system, including the types of videos offered with a list of titles and distributed them to staff and patients.

TIGR launched initially with the Care Channel, playing relaxing music and visuals mimicking the local changing weather and time of day. The soothing scenes and sounds provide patients with a way to feel connected to the outside world. Patients can maintain an awareness of morning, afternoon and night; an important sense of timing that can be lost during an extensive hospital stay. The facility also has a Welcome Marquis, which plays a welcome message, complete with information on visiting hours, Starbucks hours and a message from the hospital's CEO.

Since the launch, North Hills has obtained 45 patient education videos to play on departmental channels that are now available in addition to the Care Channel. Patients use bedside phones to order a video free of charge. Each video can be ordered an unlimited number of times and patients are free to view almost all of the videos in the library on-demand, helping to educate them on other conditions as well.

Results of implementation

TIGR video education has proven successful at North Hills Hospital. Nurses now prescribe videos to patients as part of their personal treatment plans and make requests for new video topics often. As a result, North Hills has budgeted \$3,000 for videos this year, which they expect will add about 15 new videos to its collection. Videos through the TIGR system are often used in conjunction with handouts and pamphlets and are an average of 15 minutes long. This length ensures patients are not interrupted by daily hospital workflow or find their own attention span waning.

North Hills expects to add more multilingual videos to their library as they become available. After numerous requests from nurses, the hospital was able to locate a video on diabetes in Vietnamese.

Each hospital department has its own TIGR channel and videos specially suited for its patients. Videos are available on many common conditions and topics including dialysis, diabetes, insulin and diabetes, and how to test blood sugar. The Maternal Service ward has several videos on a TIGR channel only available to its patients, including one on breastfeeding and another on when babies cry. The videos have been so informative to new mothers that maternity ward patients are now required to view them during their stay. The cardiac unit's most popular videos are on congestive heart failure and preparing for surgery.

North Hills believes that the TIGR system has been a great investment, even in a poor economy. Nurses, required to provide some type of education to each patient on every shift, are using the system as a tool for better patient care and are consistently requesting more subjects.

Angie Branch, Med/Surg & PCU Educator for North Hills, views the videos as an integral part of a provider's toolkit. "The videos have helped us raise our standard of care and the patients really appreciate the interactive option," said Branch. TIGR is so highly regarded among staff that the hospital approved funding and installed phones at each bedside in the endoscopy unit so its patients could view videos on colonoscopies and upper GI.

North Hills has extensive plans for the future of its TIGR education system. Besides the acquisition of additional videos, the hospital will add a staff education channel to run in staff lounges with updates and important information. The hospital will begin using TIGR's "quiz" function to assess a patient's understanding of the information relayed in a video. The quiz, administered via TIGR after a patient watches a prescribed video, will be rolled out first to staff, then to patients. TIGR offers other components that North Hills would like to use as well, such as scanning programs to track inventory.

The growth of the system will extend into 2010 with the full support of North Hill's Chief Nursing Officer, Jane McCurley, RN. "Using the videos makes us more confident that each patient is not only receiving the best care we can provide, but also the accompanying knowledge that will make such a difference for the patient and their family following diagnosis and discharge," McCurley said. "TIGR has helped us make patient education a top priority now and for the future of North Hills."

Mr. Fleming is CEO/President of TeleHealth Services