



Barcode Technology Helping To Deliver Safer Patient Care

NHH celebrated a big step forward in safer patient care last week: the successful introduction of barcode technology at the bedside to guard against medication errors and improve documentation.

Rolled out on a unit-by-unit basis, the new Electronic Medication Administration Record and Bedside Verification project (eMAR and BV) got underway ten months ago and is now live in all inpatient units at NHH, from the birthing suite through to intensive care.

Referred to by some health-care experts as a safety net for patients, doctors and nurses, the new system brings together the familiar barcode technology used in retail settings with hand-held scanners and mobile drug carts equipped with computers.

Every patient admitted to NHH is now assigned a unique encrypted barcode worn on a band on their wrist. The purpose of the barcode is simple: to ensure that the right patient receives the right medication at the right time.

“Our past process was a manual one,” explains Pam Garratt, NHH Pharmacy Manager, “and it carried a greater risk for human error. Last year there were approximately 300 medication incidents reported related to the administration of approximately 600,000 medication doses. The overwhelming majority of these incidents were near misses or good catches, but there was room for improvement. This technology builds more safeguards into medication administration making the task safer for the patient as well as less time consuming and stressful for the staff administering the medications.”

Under the new eMAR and BV process, the physician orders the prescriptions from the NHH Pharmacy, which validates the prescription electronically and ensures that the necessary

medication is available from an automated vending cart on the patient’s unit. Nurses on the unit administer the necessary drug, using the new scanners to verify not once but twice that the right drug is going to the right patient, at the right time. Alerts are sounded in the event that an error is about to be made. Similarly, if a medication is not given for some reason—perhaps because the patient was awaiting a test—the rationale is documented for the next shift, improving communication between the nursing, medical and other members of the health care team.

“The benefits of this new electronic system are many,” explains Helen Brenner, Vice President of Patient Services and Chief Nursing Executive, “both for the patient and for the physicians and nurses who care for them. Information is available instantly to the care providers who need to see it, and it’s available in one easy to access location. Previously, physicians and other health care professionals would have to go through multiple hard copy forms to see what had been administered.”

“eMAR is an important part of the Central East Local Health Integration Network’s initiative to create an electronic health record,” adds Brenner. “It’s our understanding that we are the first acute care hospital in our region to reach this milestone, and among the first in the province. We certainly could not have adopted these innovative tools without the support of every member of our team and a very generous community. Capital improvements such as this come with a price tag for the necessary technology and, thanks to the hard work of our NHH Foundation, we have been able to realize this important step toward a complete electronic health record.”

“THE CONSUMMATE GENTLEMAN”: NHH BOARD DIRECTOR NICK O’NIANS

*Message from Board Chair
John Hudson*

NHH lost a dedicated Board director last month, and a dear friend to the hospital and community.

Nick O’Nians, who passed away suddenly on February 12th, 2012, had served as a volunteer Director of the NHH Board since June 2001. A resident of Port Hope, he completed two years of an unexpired three-year term that had become vacant before going on to serve nine more years on the hospital. Prior to that Nick supported the NHH Foundation Board, lending his talents to the campaign committee that raised funds to build the present hospital.

An exceptional director, Nick always came prepared to the meetings. He was a consummate gentleman in every way. While he had a quiet demeanor, he asked the most probing and thought-provoking questions. He wasn’t afraid to voice alternative perspectives, and this made us a better Board and hospital.

The community couldn’t have asked for a better representative. Our hospital is a stronger organization because of Nick’s contribution. He will be dearly missed.

Feedback on our hospital communications? Please email or call Jennifer Gillard, Director of Communications and Community Engagement, at jjgillard@nhh.ca or 905-377-7757.

Upcoming NHH Foundation Events

“Hottest Event of the Year” - Scissors Sisters Dance at the Cobourg Community Centre, May 5th, 2012

Tickets on sale now - \$15 each or 2 for \$20 from the Foundation office.

For more information please visit the Foundation section at www.nhh.ca or call the 905-372-6811, ext. 3068.



NHH RN Suzanne O'Rourke scans the unique barcode identifier of patient Don Deremo of Port Hope before administering medication.



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