



Hospital Column for July 28, 2010

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Hospital to save big, electronic health records, and AlphaCare

Big savings coming

Good news! The hospital is going to be saving big bucks. Geary Community Hospital was invited to participate in an initiative through VHA Inc. that should save \$300,000-\$400,000 over the next year.

Six large hospitals in Kansas and Missouri have already documented more than \$6 million in savings in the first year. They did this by buying standardized products as a group as well as controlling distribution and storage of supplies. GCH Chief Executive Officer David Bradley is very excited about the promised savings and is confident in the already proven success of this group initiative.

VHA is a national network of not-for-profit health care organizations that work together to drive maximum savings in the supply chain arena, set new levels of clinical performance, identify, and implement best practices to improve operational efficiency and clinical outcomes. Formed in 1977, VHA serves more than 1,400 hospitals and more than 23,000 non-acute care providers nationwide.

Government's meaningful-use will cost us

Part of healthcare reform is an effort by the federal government to require all healthcare providers to install electronic medical records systems (coined "meaningful-use") or lose essential reimbursement dollars. This mandate is supposed to improve efficiency and encourage higher quality health care. There are short-term incentives for compliance, but the bottom line is that if the hospital doesn't achieve meaningful-use, its Medicare reimbursements will be cut.

In order to comply, Bradley will be forced to spend about \$200,000 in the next year for more information systems infrastructure and another \$150,000 for Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) software to achieve meaningful-use. Physicians will be

required to enter their orders for things such as lab and x-ray via the CPOE and provide a summary of the patient's hospital stay in a timely manner.

While Bradley would prefer to spend available funds on diagnostic equipment for patient care, he can't afford the loss of Medicare funds since about 40 percent of the hospital's revenues come from this source.

Government sources believe the new electronic medical record will manage patient care, store records, send information, record orders and write prescriptions as well as improve communication between hospitals, physicians, and other health organizations. In most cases, this technology will replace paper charts and will make the information on the medical record available to qualified users from any computer. The rules and timelines are in development and the only certainty is that it will be expensive and required.

AlphaCare holding its own

It's been nearly three months since AlphaCare opened its doors. AlphaCare is the hospital's walk-in clinic for the treatment of minor illnesses and injuries. So far, with an average of 20 patients per day, the clinic is exceeding expectations and meeting the goals set by the planning committee. Patients without physicians who normally use the emergency department for primary care are discovering AlphaCare. They are registering high satisfaction for prompt, quality service. There are also many requests that the clinic be open Mondays and Tuesdays, which staff is considering. Currently the clinic is open Wednesday-Friday, 3:00-10:00 p.m., Saturdays, Noon-6:00 p.m., and Sundays, Noon-5:00 p.m.