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Touch-screen care

By PATT JOHNSON • pjohnson@dmreg.com • July 21, 2010

Methodist West Hospital in West Des Moines is making patient stays at the new medical center a quieter experience, which the hospital's administrator said is helping the healing and recovery process.

"It's hard to heal when there is all that noise going on outside of a patient's room," said Chris Blair.

And while the nine-month-old hospital was designed to be quieter than most, a new high-tech nurse-call system in place there is helping keep noise levels even lower. Not quite library level, but close.

The system, called Responder 5, was brand new to the medical world when Methodist West opened last October.

"We were one of the first 20 hospitals in the nation to get Responder 5 and the first in the nation to have it in all patient rooms," Blair said. "It's amazing. At first, there were some bugs to work out, but after three months we had it figured out."

The system uses a touch screen located in a patient's room near the door. The screen contains color-coded numbers that allow doctors, nurses and other health workers to coordinate patient care. For instance, when a doctor makes rounds, he or she will press a key on the touch screen in a patient's room. That alerts nurses that the doctor is there so they can be there, too.

Patients often ask the nurses for more explanation about what the doctor said after the doctor leaves. If the nurse can be present during rounds, it saves on follow-up phone calls to the doctor, she said.

Workers also can use the system for communicating with one another.

"One of the buttons says new patient," Blair explained. When a patient is brought to a room after surgery, whoever is transporting them pushes a button that sends a text message to a nurse's cell phone to signal the patient has arrived.

"There also is a back-in-room button to let nurses know the patient is back from a test so they know

and don't have to guess," Blair said.

There also is the ability to text and alert nurses about new patient orders from doctors and other patient information.

"It cuts down on the amount of time it takes checking charts for new orders," said registered nurse Karissa Stadlander.

"Things are getting done more effectively," she said. "For instance, when a patient tells a tech (nursing assistant) they need a pain pill, the tech can push a button."

That sends a text to the nurse on duty about which room needs the medication.

"It really cuts down on the amount of time it takes to respond to a patient," she said. Patients still have a traditional call button on their beds to talk with a nurse.

The touch-screen system has reduced noise in the hallways by reducing nurse pagings on the intercom. Conversations between health workers that repeat orders now can be done by text messaging. It's quieter for both patients and staff.

"And there's less fatigue, and they can think better," Blair said.

The overall result of the new system has been that nurses have more time to spend with patients, Stadlander said. "And patients appreciate that fact."

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The system also is being used in Methodist West's operating rooms and in the emergency room, Blair said.

Methodist, which also operates Methodist Medical Center, Lutheran Hospital and Blank Children's hospital, is considering also installing the touch-screen response system at its other centers, Blair said.

The cost of the system at Methodist West was between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

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