

Switch to electronic records more than just investing in equipment

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Ever since he arrived at Gothenburg Memorial Hospital last November, Mick Brant has been behind a push to implement electronic health records.

Since federal dollars to help with the transition from paper to electronic records go away in 2015, hospital and board officials hope to make the switch in April or May of 2014, said GMH's chief executive officer.

Hardware and infrastructure are already in place for the \$1.4 million project.

NextGen Healthcare Information Systems is the software vendor for the hospital's electronic records project.

Last week, a project team, made up of hospital personnel and NextGen staff, started working together to customize the software that will be used.

However, Brant was quick to point out that there's more than just investing in physical equipment.

"Technology is the small piece," he said. "There's the human component. Training the people involved is the big piece and the hardest part because it changes the way people do their jobs."

Equally important, Brant said, is that GMH takes ownership of the transition.

Already, a steering committee of hospital personnel (including Brant) is in place to manage the

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project and another group, comprised mostly of department heads, are the subject matter experts.

Brant said NextGen will provide the software with technical expertise while GMH personnel have knowledge of how their departments work, especially when it comes to workflow.

To facilitate the design of effective workflow in departments in designing effective workflow is Tinna Therrien, formerly of Townshend, VT, who provides clinical informatics.

“She has one foot in the clinical world and the other foot in the information technology (IT) world,” he explained.

Brant worked with Therrien on IT projects, including the implementation of electronic health records, at Grace Cottage Hospital in Townshend.

The CEO described the clinical informatic role as a marriage between a nurse, doctor or other health-care provider and information technology to improve patient care.

“Tinna is building visual diagrams for departments now to show workflow,” Brant said, noting that such a process is necessary to translate how the transition will work.

Glenn Morrison of Kansas City Metro was hired as IT director at GMH to network infrastructure and upgrade the server for the transition.

Up until now, Brant said IT work at GMH was outsourced.

“We’re bringing in a lot of change so support is needed,” he said.

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Ultimately, he said he hopes the transition will be fun even though there will be times when “we’ll pull our hair out.”

“I hope in a year from now, we won’t know how we got by without it,” Brant said.

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