Northeastern Ontario Hospitals Get More for Their IT Dollars

Gaston Roy, Director of Information Technology

"The savings have been in excess of $100,000," says Gaston Roy, Director of Information Technology for Sudbury Regional Hospital about the switch from a private network to Smart Systems for Health Agency's (SSHA's) ONE™ Network.

That hospital's savings are just the beginning, as Sudbury Regional Hospital is one of eight hospitals that form part of the Northeastern Ontario Network (NEON). All save money and improve patient care with a common hospital information system.

"The integration of our applications greatly reduces the need for duplication of hospital costs. All sites can reap the benefits without having to purchase their own individual systems, which can be a great financial burden," says Tim Gehrke, Director of Corporate Services/Chief Financial Officer for Timmins and District Hospital and chair of NEON.

SSHA provides ONE Network, like a private secure Internet, that allows NEON hospitals to operate a shared information system for everything from clinical documentation to patient entry, billing and admitting requirements. NEON's information system has an Electronic Medical Record (EMR) component that brings together information from all its patient applications on one screen. This record is available at all NEON hospitals to authorized healthcare providers, with the patient's consent.

While hospitals save money, patients also benefit from the shared system.

Gehrke says: "Even more important is the fact that NEON has provided an overall improvement in patient care, the integration of the hospital information systems allows for the seamless flow of patient information between hospitals."

Hospitals need to take a patient's history once when using the EMR. They do not duplicate their efforts if a patient is referred to another NEON hospital to see a heart specialist. The common EMR improves patient care, decreases duplication

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Darlene Hancharyk, Sudbury Regional Hospital

of diagnostic tests and gives healthcare providers quicker access to clinical information.

The journey of a trauma patient can demonstrate the benefits. If a Kirkland Lake resident was seriously hurt in a car accident on Manitoulin Island, she would be rushed to Sudbury Regional Hospital. After being treated by the emergency physician, she would be transferred to the hospital's acute trauma care unit. As she had previously been treated for hypertension in Kirkland and District Hospital, another NEON hospital, Sudbury Regional could retrieve the necessary identifying, insurance and next-of-kin information to admit her, speeding up admission.

Staff in the emergency department could review her EMR, accessing records from Kirkland and District Hospital. They could see other conditions for which she is being treated and the results of diagnostic tests. Even if the patient could no longer speak, her EMR would note any allergies, for instance to Aspirin.

After treatment in Sudbury, the patient would be sent back to Kirkland and District Hospital

to complete her recovery. She would be quickly registered, as her personal information is already in the NEON system. Once in her room, the nurses could electronically check the medication received at Sudbury Regional Hospital to avoid drug interactions. Her physician could review the trauma specialist's report, along with her laboratory and diagnostic test results. To complete her hospital treatment, arrangements for follow up care and therapy upon discharge would be included in her EMR.

NEON hospitals are looking to expand the use of shared information systems beyond the EMR to create electronically available shared standards of care, allowing patients to follow the same treatment at all hospitals.

NEON's success shows that sharing information systems through SSHA connectivity is one way hospitals are improving care – while also saving money.

NEON MEMBER HOSPITALS

- Chapleau Health Services
- Englehart and District Hospital
- Kirkland and District Hospital
- Northeast Mental Health Centre
- Sudbury Regional Hospital
- Temiskaming Hospital
- Timmins and District Hospital
- Smooth Rock Falls Hospital

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