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Digital System at Bradley Memorial Makes Emergency Room Safer For Patients

[New Britain] May 26, 2006 – The Emergency Department at Bradley Memorial Hospital has gone digital. A digital record-keeping system designed to increase patient safety and cut down on paperwork went “live” this week.

The most visible difference is a large LCD screen, which replaces the old white board and magic marker system to track patients. The LCD screen is tied into a new, high-tech information system known as EmpowER.

“This new system is really incredible,” said Jeffrey Finkelstein, MD, chief of emergency medicine for Bradley Memorial and New Britain General Hospitals.

Bradley Memorial President Clarence Silvia said, “It’s the patients who will truly benefit, through increased accuracy, speed, and the many safeguards the system offers. This new technology places Bradley’s Emergency Department in a very distinctive group; there are few community hospitals that can boast this kind of service.”

The system runs primarily off 7 computer work stations located throughout the Emergency Department, which last year, saw roughly 14,000 patients. Key to the system are vast databases of information – both specific patient information and, for instance, technical data on medications.

Rene Allen Hipona, MD, director of the emergency department at Bradley, was extremely pleased as EmpowER went online on Tuesday. “We are thrilled to have the system up and running. The staff has been enthusiastic about adapting to the new technology. The system went online six months ago at New Britain General and has proven to be a resounding success, so we are looking forward to similar benefits.”

The system saves time, cuts down on paperwork, and reduces potential errors by putting standing orders and disease guidelines right at the physicians' fingertips. In addition, it compares these with an individual's specific medical condition.

"For example, if a patient arrives with a suspected case of pneumonia," Dr. Finkelstein explained, "automatically, based on the suspected diagnosis, the system would prompt the physician to order certain diagnostic tests, as well as indicate which medications might be recommended for treatment. It would automatically alert the physician if the patient is on a medication or has an allergy that might pose a conflict."

The system periodically prompts physicians to check for test results, to help get patients treated more quickly.

In addition to the benefits of assisting care providers with diagnoses, testing, and orders, there are benefits for patients even after they leave the emergency room.

"When you are discharged, your prescriptions printed out by the system, all pertinent information for your follow-up care is sent to your primary care physicians, or the specialist you will follow up with, via fax or a secure encrypted email, so they have the latest information," Finkelstein explained.

The patient also receives detailed discharge instructions, which also may be printed in Spanish or Polish.

Even physicians at other healthcare facilities have been impressed with EmpowER. "We referred a patient to another facility," Finkelstein said, "and one of the doctors there called to say they had never seen such a well organized and complete medical chart."