

Hospitals Communicating with Family Doctors London Health Sciences Centre Keeps Patient Care in Sight with LeNS

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HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU HEARD that your hospital doesn't adequately communicate patient information to the Family Physician community? That a patient can be seen, diagnosed, have surgery, and return home before their Family Physician knows about it?

At the London Health Sciences Centre, we had tried for years to improve communication to our Family Physicians. We had a large number of volunteers who focused on telephoning individual physician offices with information about patient visits. We faxed emergency room records to physicians. And we mailed out discharge summaries. But eventually, human error would intervene and some critical piece of communication would fall through the cracks.

In early 2001, a new method was needed. The hospital Health Records department contacted the Information Services group to see if together we could develop a new and better approach. Our goals were simple – we wanted a process that was:

- Easy to use by the physicians. Our experience showed that systems or processes that were complex were never attempted or quickly discarded.
- Easy to maintain. We didn't want to invest in developing an application or system that required any level of resource commitment to maintain.
- Used existing technologies. As a hospital we are striving to maintain standard technologies and approaches, and we wanted to

remain within our existing technology base to reduce cost and maintenance.

- Inexpensive. There were no capital or operating funds set aside for this initiative and we needed to find an inexpensive solution.

And we have been completely successful. Without spending a dollar of capital funding, we developed and implemented LeNS (LHSC e-Notification System), a system which notifies Family Physicians of all patient registration activity at the hospital.

The Health Records department handles the processes associated with the new service. Family physicians register for the service by contacting the hospital Health Records department, which assigns each doctor a unique password. The physician can then log onto LeNS Web site, update their password, supply an email address and customize their options.

The collection of family physician information is also now mandatory during the registration process. Exceptions to this would be in the case of patients who cannot remember their physician's name, who are physically unable to give those details, or who choose to decline when they are informed that their physician will be notified of their visit information.

The Information Services department took care of the design and implementation of the automated solution. Its design is quite straightforward. Every night, an automated search routine looks through all hospital admission, discharge, death, and emergency registration records in order to detect family physicians who have subscribed to the service. Details from those confidential records are written to a secure Web server and the data never leaves the organization. At the same time, the system automatically sends an email to the doctor to let them know there is now information on the system to review.

The next morning, the physician reads the email which notifies them that there has been patient activity. They then log into the LHSC Web server and are presented with a report of their own patients. The system was deliberately designed to look and feel like an email system

to reduce training needs; physicians are able to read, delete or print their daily reports. London Health Sciences Centre currently provides physicians with information such as the patient's presenting complaint, where they were seen, what room / campus they were admitted to, who the attending physician was, and whether they were discharged home or to a long-term care facility. Physicians are also notified of any patient deaths which occurred in the hospital.

The system is very self-maintaining. Included in the features which allow it to be self-sufficient are:

- There is no special or unique software to maintain.
- Physicians are responsible for maintaining their own records. They update their own passwords, email addresses, and system preferences.
- The software infrastructure of the system facilitates easy reporting of system usage.

For a more thorough technical description of the system architecture, please visit <http://www.lhsc.on.ca/technology/architecture/lens.htm>.

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The feedback on the LeNS system has been overwhelmingly positive. Among the reported benefits, physicians have told us that:

- They have a better and more timely sense of their patients' progress through the health-care system.
- Because it is Web-based, they can access their patient information from anywhere there is Internet access, 24 hours a day.
- Although they would like to have more clinical information at their fingertips, they now



ANNE LAWRENCE'S FAVOURITE WEBSITES

Anne Lawrence is the National Health and Education Manager at Compaq Canada Corp. Anne focuses on business development and marketing for both these sectors across the country. With a husband involved in healthcare and raising five girls, Anne has a genuine interest in improving the delivery of healthcare in Canada. But it looks like she still has time for fun on the Web.

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have the basic information available for further follow-up.

- They are able to challenge patients on their appropriate use of Emergency room services rather than walk-in clinics or their on-call services.
- They are able to assess the value and use of their on-call systems during evenings and weekends.

Demand for this service continues and the hospital now has over 120 physicians registered.

In a resource-constrained environment, hospitals are always challenged to provide quality solutions to problems. At London Health Sciences Centre, we have shown that two departments working together with innovation and imagination can produce a truly unique and valuable service that shows our commitment to our community and its physicians. **e**

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- 3 Fax 416-368-6292