

San Luis Valley hospital makes digital strides

Facility lauded as "most improved" by industry magazine for computer system.

By MATT HILDNER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

ALAMOSA — Officials at the San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center hope that information retrieval at the 85-bed hospital someday will involve a computer keystroke instead of a walk to the filing cabinet.

The hospital, recently recognized for the information-technology strides it's made in the past year, now is looking to completely digitize its medical records.



Spencer Hamons

The hospital's foundation kicked off a \$1 million fundraising campaign last week for the project that hopefully will take three to five years to complete.

The project would take the information available to clinicians and care providers and keep it in a digital format. Medical notes, lab work, radiology film and financial reports — to name a few examples — all would be in one database and accessible by providers.

Spencer Hamons, the hospital's chief information officer, said the main reason for making the switch is patient safety.

"The safest thing for us to do is have one patient (record) throughout our system and that patient's information can be communicated to everyone," he said.

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Before the hospital could consider such a transition, though, Hamons said basic problems with the hospital's computer network must be addressed first.

The hospital's computer system was extremely fragile when Hamons came on three years ago and often suffered system crashes.

"When you're running a 60 percent uptime, nobody trusts the system," he said. "You can't really have a conversation about digitization."

The hospital's leadership responded by spending \$866,000 over a two-year period to re-evaluate and redesign its network.

Hamons said the re-evaluation period was important for finding out what kind of information they had and how they were using it.

"A lot of companies, regardless of what industry they're in, think that IT (informational technology)

change happens by installing a computer," he said.

The commitment shown by the hospital to upgrade its information technology has garnered notice from the industry.

Earlier this week, the hospital was named with 100 other hospitals across the country as "Most Wired-Most Improved," in an annual survey included in this month's issue of "Hospitals & Health Networks" magazine.

The survey focused on how hospitals use information technologies for quality, customer service, public health and safety, business processes and workforce issues.

Memorial Health System of Colorado Springs was the only other Colorado organization to make the list.

Hamons said evaluating the security of the digitization project is an ongoing process.

Although he declined to discuss the specifics of upgrading the system's safety, Hamons said the practices the hospital institutes would, in some respects, be similar to those used by the banking industry.

"We use a lot of banking's best practices in the health care IT industry," he said.

But Hamons emphasized that the system's safety would rely on more than just the network's defenses against computer hackers.

Something as simple as where an administrative assistant located his or her computer terminal could make a difference.

"If I can walk through there and snap a picture of the screen with my cell phone, that is not a secure location," he said. "People don't think about those kinds of things and that's a security risk."

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Valley

Valley

San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center named to list of 'most wired' hospitals

Most wired hospitals wield tools of technology



Spencer Hamons, chief information officer at SLV Regional Medical Center

CHICAGO — San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center has been named to the nation's Most Wired - Most Improved list, according to the results of the 2007 Most Wired Survey and Benchmarking Study released yesterday in the July issue of Hospitals & Health Networks magazine, which has named the 100 Most Wired hospitals and health systems since 1999.

Spencer Hamons, chief information officer at SLV Regional Medical Center said the organization "has exhibited extraordinary leadership in numerous areas over the past few years, all with the purpose of enhancing health care for residents of the San Luis Valley. This award is recognition of the vision of the SLVRMC leadership team, and the hard work that has been proffered by the entire staff of both the hospital and the clinic. This award does not honor any single group of employees, but all of the leaders, clinicians and employees

of SLVRMC and their dedication to 'making exceptional healthcare personal' to our families here in the San Luis Valley."

The nation's 100 Most Wired hospitals show better outcomes in four key areas: mortality rates, patient safety measures from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), core measures from Hospital Compare and average

length of stay. Based on analysis of the ninth annual Most Wired Survey and Benchmarking Study results, hospitals are embracing technology as a key tool for health care quality improvements.

"Many hospitals have made strong commitments to using information technology to improve the quality of care," said Rich Umbdenstock, president and CEO of the American Hospital Association. "They are combining technology with clinical knowledge and creativity with a focus on improving outcomes, and making care safer and more streamlined for both patients and clinicians."

The Most Wired Survey is conducted annually by Hospitals & Health Networks magazine, which uses the results to name the 100 Most Wired hospitals and health systems. It focuses on how the nation's hospitals use information technologies for quality, customer service, public health and safety, business processes and workforce issues.

Hospitals & Health Networks conducted the 2007 survey in cooperation with Accenture, McKesson Corp. and the College of Healthcare Information Management Executives. The July H&HN cover story detailing results is available at www.hhnmag.com.