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Utilizing Innovative Informatics Solutions to Improve Patient Care Delivery in the Emergency Department

by Bev Merrifield, RN & Sue Munro, RN

ABSTRACT

The Vancouver Island Health Authority (South Island) recently designed and implemented an electronic triage documentation and tracking system for use within their three emergency departments (two tertiary referral sites and one community hospital). Partnerships were developed between the three emergency departments, the VYSTA project team, the information systems department, ancillary clinical departments, and the vendor.

The FirstNet tracking system is instrumental in enhancing communication within each Emergency Department, and between geographically separated sites. The ability to “view” each Emergency department improved all aspects of patient care, from pre hospital arrival to discharge, enabling decisions that improve timely and appropriate access to care.

The ability to alert all care providers to safety issues was enhanced with the implementation of the FirstNet system. While maintaining patient confidentiality, ‘flags’ are posted on the tracking board that identify specific care needs of individual patients and potential risks for care providers.

Icons or picture representations are utilized on the tracking board and clearly indicate pending investigations and patient status. This provides an ‘at a glance’ overview of the current status of the emergency department. Time based reassessment alerts were built into the system incorporating the Canadian Triage Acuity Standards. This innovative technology has been adopted by other organizations within Canada and the United States as we all attempt to meet standards and the ongoing needs of our clients.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bev Merrifield, RN

For thirteen years Bev provided emergency care to patients in the emergency department of the Royal Jubilee Hospital. In 2002, she joined the VYSTA project as the ER departmental specialist for the FirstNet Team. As a key member of the project team her responsibilities included the design, build, testing, training and implementation of the FirstNet triage and tracking application. Key to the success of this project was her sound understanding of the work environment, key stakeholders, and clinical and business processes. In her current role, Bev supports clinical informatics for the Victoria General, Royal Jubilee, and Saanich Peninsula Emergency departments as the ER Services Business Analyst.

Sue Munro, RN

Sue began her 'emergency' career in 1980. Since that time she has filled a variety of roles within the emergency department as a front line care provider and departmental charge nurse. Following an injury in 1998, she returned to University and pursued an interest in computer based information systems. In 2000, Sue was fortunate to be able to blend her passion for nursing and clinical informatics and became the Project Leader for the development of a triage and tracking tool. In 2003, Sue expanded her involvement with the emergency department and clinical informatics and became the manager of the Victoria General Emergency Department, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program and Emergency Department Clinical Informatics.