

More time with patients, less with paperwork
Hospitals join pilot program to boost quality of care
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An Appleton-based hospital system hopes to put a new twist on the term flip-flop.
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For two hospitals in the ThedaCare system, flip-flopping is what they want to accomplish when it comes to the amount of time nurses spend with patients.

"Our hospitals are similar to hospitals across the country in that 30 percent of a nurse's time is spent on direct patient care and 70 percent is spent on other stuff. We want to flip-flop that," said Jody Ausloos, vice president of Appleton Medical Center and Theda Clark Medical Center in Neenah.

Doctors, nurses and other staff members at Appleton and Theda Clark medical centers are part of a pilot study at 13 hospital systems nationwide that, over the next two years, will search for ways to improve care, including time nurses spend with patients, Ausloos said.

The pilot program, "Transforming Care at the Bedside," is sponsored by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

"Transforming bedside care has the potential to profoundly improve the patient-caregiver relationship," said Patricia Rutherford, institute vice president and director of the program.

"It has a great deal to do with nurses because they spend the most time with patients," said Rutherford, whose non-profit group is based in Boston. "But also, doctors and other staff are involved as they are part of medical teams, and we want to create more effective teams."

"Through this program, we are looking at ways to reduce time spent on paperwork and other responsibilities that take nurses away from the bedside," said Jamie Dunham, a nurse manager at Theda Clark.

Among other things, the study will look for ways to improve medication systems to avoid mistakes, making sure hospitals use the best scientific methods to treat cancer, heart disease and other illnesses, Rutherford said.

Reduction of pain and suffering is another goal of the project, she said.

"We are engaging hospitals throughout the country who are innovators and ThedaCare has the evidence that they are innovators," Rutherford said.

ThedaCare often is ranked near the top when compared with other hospital systems nationwide

for quality and patient safety.

A main idea behind the pilot program, said Ausloos, is that there is a link between the quality of care patients receive and the satisfaction caregivers get from their work.

To that end, the program also seeks to improve job satisfaction because ThedaCare wants to be "the employer of choice," she said.

The pilot program will run until May 2006.

Other hospitals participating are:

Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston; Bronson Healthcare Group, Kalamazoo, Mich.; Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles; Children's Memorial Hospital, Chicago; James A. Haley VA Hospital, Tampa, Fla.; Kaiser Foundation Hospital, Roseville, Calif.; North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System, Great Neck, N.Y.; Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago; Prairie Lakes Hospital, Prairie Lakes Healthcare System, Watertown, S.D.; Seton Northwest Hospital, Ascension Health System, Austin, Texas; University of Pittsburgh Medical Center-Shadyside, Pittsburgh; University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Houston.