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## News

STATE HOSPITAL

### For the records, state hospital is revamping its filing system

Staff being trained in new programs, which are to be phased in during next year

BY ALAN GUSTAFSON • STATESMAN JOURNAL • JANUARY 23, 2010

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A chaotic, outdated medical records system that jeopardizes the safety of patients and staffers is headed for the scrap heap at the Oregon State Hospital.



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Plans call for replacing the old-fashioned paper-dominated system with a \$25 million computerized health records system, officials say.

The Salem psychiatric facility, which opened in 1883, might be the last hospital in the state to shed its reliance on reams of paper records, officials said.

"Staff in general are really ready for this," hospital superintendent Roy Orr said. "They know how chaotic and inefficient our current medical record keeping is. Our patients always have deserved a better information system, and why not now?"

Two years ago, federal investigators cited flawed medical record keeping in a report that documented sweeping defects in patient care at the psychiatric facility. Fixing the records system is crucial to hospital reforms, officials say.

"The hospital currently operates using limited, scattered technology and paper records," stated a recent OSH replacement project bulletin. "The lack of an integrated system fosters inconsistencies and puts the hospital at risk, including the safety of patients and staff."

The records system is rooted in paper, clipboards, phones, faxes, scanners, posted notes — even backpacks. Patients lug their medical charts in backpacks as they walk or ride buses across the hospital campus to attend centralized treatment malls.

"That's burdensome, it's antiquated and it's asking for some potential problems to try and cart charts

around," Orr said. "So we're welcoming this new era."



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Oregon State Hospital patients currently must carry backpacks containing their treatment records. A planned \$25 million computerized health records system will end the facility's outdated reliance on paper records. Patients are not identified in the photo to preserve their privacy. (Kobbi R. Blair | Statesman Journal)

#### PAPER TRAIL

Oregon State Hospital reports having at least 20,000 cubic feet of stored paper records. By extension, that would create a paper trail stretching from the state hospital along Center Street NE to the Capitol Mall and back three times.

#### COMPUTER TRAINING

Hundreds of Oregon State Hospital employees have received basic computer training to prepare them for the upcoming shift to a computerized medical records system. Employees will receive additional training to learn to use the new system, which will be phased in and coincide with the staggered opening of various sections of a new state hospital in Salem.



### 'Huge Advantages' Envisioned

To rectify the problem, the state has contracted with Netsmart Technologies Inc., a New York-based firm, for an electronic records system.

Plans call for a state-of-the-art computer software system to be phased in, coinciding with staggered construction of a new \$280 million replacement hospital in central Salem.

The first section of the new 620-bed hospital is scheduled to open in late autumn, and the facility will become fully operational in 2011.

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Funding for the electronic records system was provided within a \$458 million package approved by the Legislature to build two new psychiatric facilities to replace the existing 127-year-old facility — deemed obsolete and unsafe by state-hired consultants.

After the new hospital opens in Salem, a 360-bed psychiatric facility is scheduled to be built in Junction City. The Lane County facility will open in 2013.

Medical records at the two new hospitals will be linked by the electronic system. The new information network also will extend to OSH's Portland facility and the Blue Mountain Recovery Center in Eastern Oregon, another state-run psychiatric hospital.

Electronic records are expected to provide better tracking of medications, lab results, dietary requirements, patient behavior, discharge plans and more.

"Geez, let me count the ways," Orr said, assessing the potential benefits. "It's so fundamental to any health care enterprise to be able to document what it's doing, how well it's doing, and to be able to communicate that, particularly in a setting like this where we have so many people involved in the treatment.

"The opportunity to actually see another member of the treatment team's note in a virtual instant when it's entered as opposed to waiting for a fax or a scan ... it just has huge advantages for us."

#### Patients Will Get To Log On

Years of planning paved the way for conversion to the electronic records system, officially known as the Behavioral Health Integration Project, or BHIP.

Project leaders included hospital employees in the process. More than 100 employees reviewed proposals submitted by electronic records system vendors competing for the state contract, said Ben Kahn, BHIP manager.

Netsmart Technologies, the firm awarded the contract, operates in 35 other states and is recognized as an industry leader in behavioral health electronic medical records, Kahn said.

"They're not building something for us," he said. "We're just purchasing the



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Unlike the fragmented system that exists now, computerized records allow for constant tracking of patients as they move from one building to another.

"Wherever they are, you want the record to follow them," Kahn said. "So the electronic record allows that transportability to happen."

In the future, patients will be able to inspect their own medical records via the electronic system.

"It's not something that we're turning on at the very beginning," Kahn said. "We've got to understand how to use the software first. But it is a feature that we'll add down the road so that the patients don't have to ask for a copy of their charts. They'll actually have access to their charts through the Web with the right log in and password."

Kahn and other members of the BHIP team are limited-duration employees whose jobs are scheduled to end after the electronic system becomes fully operational at the two new hospitals in Salem and Junction City.

"Our positions go away in about three years, and the hospital is left with the product, probably for a long, long time," Kahn said. "We don't get this opportunity very often, so I want to make sure we do this right."

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