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User-centric Hospital Information System at St Andrew's



May 2008: The Pharmacy staff do not need to spend time physically checking stock levels when transferring items from the various stores in St Andrew's Community Hospital.

There is also no need to manually order and record stock says manager Chua Lee Cheng, thanks to the Hospital Information System (HIS). Implemented in July 2007, the system from NovaHealth allows the staff to get work done, without leaving the Pharmacy.

As a result, Lee Cheng and her colleagues now have more time to devote to the needs of the hospital wards as well as outpatients.

"A system is considered good only when users find it easy to use, and it saves time and provides a seamless integrated workflow in the organisation," says Lee Cheng. The manager and her team of six use the system to cater to the requirements of about 150 inpatients and outpatients daily.

When a patient is first warded for two weeks to a month in the hospital, their records (including medication files) are entered into the system. The Pharmacy department can call up these records after the patient's first week's supply has been used up. Pharmacy then evaluates and dispenses the appropriate medication to the patient in the ward using online and real-time information.

St Andrew's Community Hospital with a staff strength of 216, prides itself as having a lean and efficient team complemented by the HIS. With the information system in place, paperwork is also minimised.

(A 2003 report on a study by the Harvard Medical School and the Canadian Institute for Health Information on the costs of health care administration in the United States and Canada determined that a staggering 31 percent of US health care dollars went to health care administrative costs.)

The move to upgrade the older HIS (in use since 1999) was spurred on by the hospital moving from Elliot Road to much larger premises in Simei, in April 2005. From 60 beds, it has expanded to 200 beds, thus requiring changes to hospital operations and care processes.

In mid-2006, the hospital began the tender process to select a vendor to upgrade its HIS. It finally chose VESALIUS, a full-fledged hospital information system provided by NovaHealth, which covers front-end modules such as Appointments, Registrations, ADT and billing, as well as ancillary support modules such as Pharmacy, Medical Records, back-end Inventory and integration to the Financial System.

Dr Loh Yik Hin, the hospital's chief executive officer, highlighted the fact that the project team focused on being user-centric rather than IT-centric in the choice of an HIS. Ultimately, the HIS has to be user-friendly and to help relieve staff of administrative work so that they can focus on patient care. User departments were pro-active and committed during the pre-selection brainstorming and consultancy and during the implementation stages of the new system.

The project took eight months of work, spearheaded by Tan Siew Tuan the financial controller who oversees the IT operations of the hospital; Didi Ang, senior executive in the Business Office and Lee Cheng from Pharmacy.

The user departments enjoying the benefits of the new HIS include the Outpatient Clinic, Day Rehabilitation Centre, Pharmacy, Central Store Department and the Business Office (in charge of admission, discharge and billing).

Dr Loh summed up the main benefits of the system as:

- Assisting management to track costs down to the minute details;
- Increasing efficiency as manual and administrative work are being minimised;
- Enabling links to the Ministry of Health's ENCC (Elderly and Continuing Care) system for online submission of information to receive government subsidies; and the Central Claims Processing System (CCPS) for automated submission for Medisave claims;
- Serving as a check and balance for inventory audit and reducing waste.

The new information system is still undergoing fine-tuning to suit the needs and requirements of its users and the hospital.