Hospital launches state-of-the-art computer system

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Oconee Medical Center went live Monday with a state-of-the-art hospital information system called Paragon® that will enhance quality, safety and efficiency through the seamless sharing of information.

The hospital started the final steps necessary to bring the system live at 5 p.m. on Thursday. At that time, previous information systems were disconnected and most processes returned to paper. Staff spent the weekend transferring historical information to Paragon.

"When Paragon goes live, it will represent another huge step forward for our organization and the patients we serve," said Jeanne Ward, president and CEO of Oconee Medical Center. "It is just as important as the opening of our new patient tower in June 2009."

By utilizing a single record for every patient, regardless of which department delivers care, Paragon streamlines the entire patient care process from admission to discharge. It also created a single historical record for each patient that can be accessed upon each subsequent visit to the hospital.

"We will be communicating information among doctors, nurses and other caregivers more quickly, which will result in better outcomes for our patients," said Hunter Kome, Oconee Medical Center's chief operating officer.

Kome said much of the cost of the Paragon system would be reimbursed through federal stimulus funding approved designed to encourage hospitals to implement electronic medical records.

Paragon is an industry-leading hospital information system developed by McKesson, America's oldest and largest healthcare services company. McKesson's goal is to help medical providers coordinate care, improve quality and performance and to better use technology as they deliver care to millions of patients every day.

"McKesson is excited to extend the long-standing partnership with Oconee Medical Center," said Jim Pesce, president of Enterprise Information Solutions for McKesson Technology Solutions. "We are honored that Oconee selected Paragon to support their mission of delivering the best care possible to their community."

Paragon has a lot of flexibility, and teams of Oconee Medical Center employees worked for almost a year to customize the program to maximize its advantages, Kome said.

Oconee Medical Center's nursing staff is excited about the new computer system, said Sarah James, R.N., particularly since some aspects of the nurses' work was computerized in 2010 using a different system.

"These past few years have cultured confidence in electronic documentation and increased both the staff and community's awareness of the benefits it provides," James said. "Employees who have already been through Paragon training have commented that Paragon is more user-friendly and intuitive than our current system.

"The charting screens are easier to navigate, and processing orders on a patient is simplified," she said. "As a result of the customization Paragon allows, we can document on a format designed by our co-workers based on the specific needs of Oconee Medical Center."

Allergy information and home medication information remain on the patient's electronic medical record and carry forward from visit to visit, reducing the potential for errors and decreasing the time required for the nurse to admit the patient. As a result of the integration between various areas of the hospital, including order entry by physicians, virtually every facet of patient care is expedited.

"There will be no more handwritten orders or delays waiting for orders," said Jay Hansen, Oconee Medical Center's director of information technology. "All the orders will be checked by a computer and flagged if there is a question or concern. It is simply safer and much faster."

Built into the Paragon system are "best practice" procedures that healthcare workers are prompted to use throughout the patient care process. These "templates" for care are based on each patient's diagnosis and health history.

Not only will patients benefit from Paragon, but so will family members. Hansen noted that tracking boards will be installed in hospital waiting rooms so that family members can use privacy codes to get updated reports on the care of their loved ones.

"Medicine is a team effort, and we can all communicate better if we are using the same playbook," Hansen said. "Paragon is all about providing better, safer and more efficient health care."