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Can an app improve patient hospital stays? Mercy Health thinks so

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FAIRFIELD — Hospital patients at Mercy Health in Fairfield can now order ice chips or pillows, or look up facts about their nurses and doctors thanks to a medical software application.

The app, called MyChart Bedside, is accessible using a tablet computer provided to some patients admitted overnight.

The Butler County hospital started testing the technology in August in one of its surgical departments with plans to expand it to more areas of the Fairfield hospital in the future, said Robin Saxon, nurse manager of one of the hospital's medical/surgical units.

Not only can it help keep patients entertained and give them a new way to communicate to nurses, but the technology's real power is the potential for the app to help reduce re-admissions and improve care quality, Saxon said.

"There's definitely a need for it. It keeps the patient educated. It helps the patient understand their medications," Saxon said.

In the unit Saxon oversees, about 10 tablets are available for patients to use as long as they don't have an infectious disease. The tablet hardware is cleaned between patients and data is electronically wiped between users, she said.

And it's not just for patients. With patient permission, caregivers can also use the device to look at test results and leave notes for doctors the next time a doctor checks in.

However, lab results aren't available right away. Results are posted within about 24 hours, giving medical staff time to explain procedures and findings to patients before they see it on the computer, Saxon said.

Also on the tablet are a web browser, games, and information about prescriptions and follow-up appointments.

Upon discharge from the hospital, patients can also download a related MyChart application to their mobile phone, allowing them to virtually take their medical records with them if they're not already signed up for it, according to Mercy Health.

"If I'm thirsty, I don't have to push the call button," said Raymond Bowers, of Hamilton, who was admitted to the Fairfield hospital in November. One of the first things he did was play the game Cookie Jam.

"You're not bored all the time," Bowers said. "This is going to make this stay much more pleasurable."

MyChart and MyChart Bedside was developed by Wisconsin-based company Epic Systems Corp., the same company that developed the electronic medical record system most Cincinnati health systems use.

"MyChart Bedside helps patients feel like an active member of their care team," said Epic spokeswoman Erika Koch in an email.

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