



Ask the Expert
Arizona Republic

Q: I recently read an article on electronic medical records and how they are becoming more commonplace in the healthcare arena. How do they work and what benefits do they afford patients?

A: In Catholic Healthcare West's (CHW) case, the addition of an electronic medical record (EMR) system enhances our role within the CHW continuum of care by making records available, regardless of which facility a patient is utilizing.

For example, if a patient is transferred from one of our Urgent Care centers to Chandler Regional Medical Center or Mercy Gilbert Medical Center, the patient's record automatically becomes available to the receiving facility. Utilizing this system also allows for the patient's record to be more comprehensive, and legibility is no longer an issue as compared to the previous paper record.

The implementation of an EMR can make healthcare service delivery more satisfying and efficient, and will help improve our working relationships with one another and with our patients. This includes:

- **Improved patient care:** With an EMR, the potential for medical errors is significantly reduced, thus enhancing the high quality and safety of the patient care we provide. The EMR allows physicians to immediately access information about their patient's condition and medical history from the hospital, their office, the patient's bedside, or even the operating room.
- **Accessible patient data from anywhere:** The most up-to-date medical information is accessible even when a patient relocates to a new town, travels for business or pleasure, or seeks medical treatment from a specialist located across the country.
- **Physicians have more time to spend with their patients:** The use of an EMR creates additional time for the work physicians and nurses were trained to do. While there is an initial investment in transitioning to an automated system, the long-term benefits include more time with patients to accurately diagnose and treat them.

In preparation for the transition from a paper medical record to an EMR, all CHW East Valley facilities, including the Urgent Care centers, installed a Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS) nearly three years ago. PACS compliments the EMR, allowing for radiology reports and x-ray images to be viewed by a physician at any CHW East Valley facility, as well as by a secure Web application in the privacy of the physician's office.



Catholic Healthcare West



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