

HealthLeaders

Educating Patients to Improve Outcomes

By Joe Cantlupe, HealthLeaders magazine, July 2010

Sometimes patients don't truly consider their questions, or they're too overwhelmed after they've been told they need to undergo surgery. That's why Beaumont Hospitals—a three-hospital system in Michigan that includes Royal Oak, Troy, and Grosse Point—began using online interactive media education programs to give patients information about their impending procedures. Surgeons say the interactive tool provides a host of questions and answers, some that patients would never have thought to ask. At Beaumont, the use of these programs has resulted in a significant reduction in surgical cancellation rates, according to top hospital officials.

Generally, hospitals are trying to ease the transition for patients grappling with new cancer information and their eventual care. The Emmi Solutions program it uses is designed to make it easier for patients to understand the disease they are confronting and the procedure they will undergo. The majority of Beaumont's surgical patients now view an Emmi program in their own home.

The partnership with Chicago-based Emmi Solutions “has been an evolving experience,” says Daniel Silvasi, MD, medical director of operating rooms at Beaumont's Troy hospital. “The initial goal was to improve patient education, specifically for anesthesia, but we saw it improved satisfaction and was a value-add.” Because of the system, “our cancellation rates have decreased from 4.8% to 1.5%,” says Silvasi.

In addition, “we're experiencing fewer patient calls to the OR nurses prior to surgery because the programs have already answered the patient questions,” says Joy Seguin, RN, nurse manager of preadmission testing at the Troy facility.

The program uses a soothing voice, animation, and easy-to-read text, says Michelle Kaufman, director of oncology services at Jennie Edmundson Hospital in Council Bluffs, IA, which also recently adopted the program to better establish communication with patients. The patients use the program in the privacy of their own home, feel better prepared, and have fewer questions and more confidence.

“It helps physicians and the hospitals to provide information they can count on, and not to overlook any details,” says David J. Winchester, MD, chief of the division of general surgery and chair of surgical oncology at the NorthShore University HealthSystem. The program allows the patients to repeatedly review information about their specific cancer, if they want. In addition, the program is important for physicians or nurses who may fail to mention certain details about a particular cancer. The program “provides consistent data for every patient,” he says.

The programs are built in a manner that also helps to buttress legal protections for the hospital, Winchester adds. “There is a log-in, the patient's password, and there is a description what was reviewed, and it becomes a record.”

In addition to providing consistent information to patients, it also provides an opportunity to obtain informed consent, and becomes part of the legal record to protect patients and the healthcare system, Winchester adds.