Lessons learned smooth the way

Integration at Last: Memorial Goes Live on Epic

By Erin Emery

Memorial Hospital ushered in a new era Saturday, Nov. 2, when it flipped the switch on Epic – an electronic medical record system University of Colorado Health believes will improve lives.

The historic change occurred at 4:15 a.m. When it did, the phones in the Epic Command Center began ringing, but not as often as they did during the July “go-live” at UCHealth North (Poudre Valley Hospital and Medical Center of the Rockies).

“I feel a certain sense of pride that we’ve actually learned from previous go lives,” Cain said. “I think this is going really great. The people here at South [Memorial] are stressed because this is a lot of changes all at once.

“I seem to remember thinking during our implementation [at Central] that I would rather change careers than go through a whole week of this. And, we’re certainly busy, but the number of things that are broken here is very small,” Cain said.

The move to Epic, while huge for Memorial, is monumental for UCHealth. It signals a new era of unification, one that culminates years of planning, execution and a vision to integrate clinically across the Front Range – a strategic goal of the organization.

With the benefit of lessons learned during go lives at UCHealth North and two years ago at UCHealth Central (University of Colorado Hospital), the number of calls to the help desk at Memorial within the first 72 hours were 29 percent less than the number for a comparable time at North.

Experience counts. That brought Mike Cain, a Radiant Systems analyst who has worked all three “go-lives” at UCHealth, a healthy satisfaction.

“We have very clear direction to integrate the systems across the Front Range, and with that clear direction and that clear priority, there’s nothing that we can’t do,” said Steve Hess, chief.
information officer for UCHealth. “When I say ‘we,’ it’s a collective ‘we.’ Something like Epic is not an IT project; it’s an organizational project with obvious heavy IT involvement.”

**Bumps in the road.** Still, in the early hours after the cutover, the anticipated hiccups came, everything from computer battery issues to printer woes to nagging integration problems. The biggest problem, however, was the inability to consistently see lab results in Epic. In the early going, employees had to go to Cerner for those results.

“By far the biggest problem has been the lab integration,” said Soren Schoultz, UCHealth vice president of information technology. “The talking between the two systems was not consistent.”

The Epic interface team and representatives from both vendors camped out on the fifth floor of the East Tower and addressed the problem head-on. By Sunday evening, the team found a solution that led to more lab results appearing in Epic, although work on the issue continues.

Overall, however, leveraging the lessons learned during previous go-lives proved to be a big advantage for Memorial.

“Each time, you learn some things,” Schoultz said. “We had security problems at Poudre Valley in July, and while we have some [here], it’s not like it was. It has not dominated our conversations like it did in the first week at Poudre Valley. And it’s a huge success story this time. The team has done a fantastic job.”

**All hands on deck.** Fewer than 24 hours after the Epic go-live, Memorial employees seemed to be handling the changes – and the anticipated hiccups – in stride. On floor after floor at Memorial Hospital Central, day and night, there were smiles and laughs.

In Oncology, nurses Kathy Noel and Tammie Hilliard, along with tech Ann Nielsen, laughed and struck a Charlie’s Angels pose with their medication new bar-code readers. In the ICU about midnight, one nurse proudly noted that it would take a lot more than Epic to rattle their unit.

For the issues that did arise, there was no shortage of Epic super-users wandering the units in their hard-to-miss red scrubs. At the Command Center on the fifth floor, employees sat poised at their computers and phones, ready for the next call. White boards with phone numbers and other frequently referenced info hung at the front of the room.

Belinda Nixon, project manager for Epic at Memorial, said the availability of coffee and preparations made in advance for shuttle and parking, were extremely helpful.

The Epic “go-live” at Memorial is the latest in a series of projects to integrate technologically across the Front Range. In recent months, IT has integrated the UCHealth network, tele-tracking (patient flow, environmental services and patient transport), email, the GI system called Provation, Lawson and PACs between Poudre Valley and Memorial. The integration with Central will come soon. In the coming weeks, the system will launch another massive project – to put Windows 7 on an estimated 16,000 desktops and laptops at UCHealth.

Like Epic, that, too, will take the collective we.