NCH converting records to new vendor

System makes it easier to gain health access

Liz Freeman
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The NCH Healthcare System is switching patient medical records to an electronic system used by major hospital systems that will make it easier for local patients to access health care elsewhere in the U.S.

The nonprofit NCH in Collier County began the massive undertaking in January 2021 to switch to Epic Systems for electronic medical records and budgeted $72 million for the project. The actual price tag is estimated to be under $65 million.

The switch for more than 1 million patient records is scheduled to go live June 4 after months of testing.

The move to Epic includes patients who are treated at NCH hospitals and physician offices, diagnostic centers and outpatient surgery centers. NCH has been using Cerner for its electronic medical records up to now.

NCH says the switch is a giant step forward for networking with other hospitals that use Epic and for patients who travel or spend part of the year in other parts of the country and need medical care. Epic is used by roughly 1,700 U.S. hospitals. Patients know the Epic system as MyChart.

For instance, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Cleveland Clinic and top academic hospitals use Epic, said Paul Hiltz, president and chief executive officer of NCH.

Hiltz

The popular online service called MyChart in app form. MyChart is part of Epic Systems. BON SECOURS ST. FRANCIS HEALTH SYSTEM

NCH

"Epic brings transformational change to our healthcare system," Hiltz said. "Our patients will now have access to their records from anywhere. It's the premier electronic health record system and will improve the patient experience and allow us to continue to provide the best quality care."

Lee Health, the publicly-operated hospital system in Lee County, switched to Epic starting about 10 years ago and it became fully functional at all four of its hospitals by 2013.

Physicians Regional Healthcare System in Collier uses Cerner, spokeswoman Brittney Thoman said.

What will patients need to do?

NCH patients who have electronic access through MyNCH Health Portal will receive an electronic notice of the change, according to NCH spokeswoman Amanda Lucey.

"Existing patients who have the MyNCH Health Portal will need to set up new electronic access," she said, adding that they will get instructions.

More than 1.1 million records are being converted from Cerner to Epic involving patients who have been treated by NCH in the past three years, Lucey said.

"All other patients are being migrated to an archival platform in accordance with data retention standards," she said.

The go-live move is systemwide, which means all locations will be taken offline at 12:01 a.m. June 4 and Epic will go live around 4 a.m. the same day, she said.

"There is a planned four-hour downtime to convert from Cerner to Epic," she said. "Data migration will continue for several weeks after the June 4 go live. The current system will still be available while data is being migrated."

Roughly 4,300 NCH employees are being trained on the new Epic system where the amount of training varies by role but averages four hours per individual, Lucey said.

Epic has the bulk of the market

The Madison, Wisconsin-based Epic currently is used for records of 250 million patients in the U.S. and is the largest vendor for electronic medical records, according to KLAS Research. Epic reported $3.8 billion in revenue last year.

The company had 33% of the hospital market for electronic medical records as of the end of 2021, followed by Cerner with 24% and Meditech at third with 16.7% of the market, according to KLAS. The other vendors with market share include CPSI, Allscripts and Medhost.

Epic gained 74 hospitals last year for electronic medical records, according to KLAS.

Walmart announced last year it is using Epic for electronic health records for patients when it opens four Walmart health centers in Florida this year.

Dr. Cheryl Pegus, executive vice president of Walmart Health & Wellness, said at the time that Walmart's vision is to provide a seamless experience for customers and its partners in offering medical services.

"Leveraging best-in-class partners like Epic and their technology platform will assist us in providing a unified health record across care settings, geographies and multiple sources of health data," she said in a news release.