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Gold Coast Hospital goes digital

Gold Coast Hospital will today officially activate a brand new wireless digital network across its tower blocks and Emergency Department as part of a \$600 thousand mobile computing upgrade.

The hospital was built in the 1970's when the internet was unknown and typewriters and hand-written notes were used.

Modern healthcare involves mobile digital solutions where the information that clinicians need is available to them throughout the hospital, especially at the bedside.

Gold Coast Health CEO Dr Adrian Nowitzke said Queensland Health was committed to providing health professionals with access to the latest technology.

"The Gold Coast University Hospital will be the premier digital hospital in Australia when it opens in 2012," Dr Nowitzke said.

"In the meantime, we are dedicated to providing a modern healthcare system in our existing facilities at Southport.

"Doctors, nurses and allied health staff want to spend more time with patients and less time with computers at desks.

"A trial at Robina Hospital last year showed mobile computing could deliver the best of both worlds which will result in improved patient care," Dr Nowitzke said.

There are more than 50 new mobile computers being introduced into Gold Coast Hospital, making it the largest wireless health facility on the Coast.

More than 30 of the latest "Tablet PC's" that are carried like a notebook are complemented by more than 20 traditional laptops housed on specially designed trollies.

Staff will be able to access the hospital information systems, pathology results and data to assist in clinical decision making.

The first fully digital hospital X-Ray system on the Gold Coast will begin early next year.

An electronic medical record (EMR) is expected to be ready for the opening of the expansion of the Robina Hospital in 2011.

The system has been in a testing phase for two weeks and already health professionals are seeing the results.

Pharmacist Linda Stockwell said the main benefit of the system was having immediate access to the patient's full medical history which helped with the discharge process and improved medication safety.

"Its about accessing information in real time at the bedside where you can have a one on one discussion with the patient," Ms Stockwell said.

"For example, we can confirm their usual GP and community pharmacy which helps us liaise directly with their primary carer greatly improving communication about the patient.

"Now we can process medication orders at the ward and have the labels print out in the dispensary, speeding up the patient's discharge from hospital and eliminating the need for ward nursing staff to physically attend the pharmacy with medical charts."

Gold Coast Health is undertaking a Transformation Program to modernise public healthcare on the Gold Coast.

Improving the quality of care through Electronic Reform is one of the four pillars of the Transformation Program.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Wireless System

The Cisco based wireless mobile network is a self managed and secure system. It provides a high quality of service, secure patient information on a completely mobile network. The Gold Coast Hospital is the first Queensland Health site to use the full power of the Cisco based wireless suite of products and will be the benchmark for future deployments.

The Tablet PCs

The Motion Computing C5 is a rugged, light weight tablet PC designed specifically for clinical environments. It is highly integrated and includes a camera, barcode scanner and RFID reader to better enable patient care at point of delivery. The C5 can withstand drops and bumps and is sealed to allow for disinfecting to ensure patient safety. The C5 can deliver any application a normal PC can but not all current software takes advantage of the powerful new input methods available.

Mobile Computers

The Computer on Wheels (or COW) is a laptop mounted on an easy to move trolley and includes a full size keyboard and mouse. The COW is a more powerful device than the C5 and enables the use highly complex applications, such as medical imaging, in the clinical environment. The COW can also be used as a normal PC to alleviate demand on other PCs in the ward.