



AIRSTRIP TECHNOLOGIES

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Content:

Your obstetrician knows what's going on, miles or minutes away while attending to another patient.

Talk about peace of mind for a laboring mother, a jittery father and a busy obstetric unit.

Obstetricians on staff at North Naples Hospital off Immokalee Road have the capability now to view from anywhere and anytime the fetal heart monitor readouts from laboring patients and their vital signs, using a combined personal digital assistant, PDA, and cell phone.

Called AirStrip OB, the software technology is from GE Healthcare and is the company's newest development in remote fetal heart monitoring being rolled out in the hospital market. NCH was a pilot site for GE late last year and is the fourth or fifth hospital nationwide to be using it, said Jon Hartigan, a marketing manager with the company.

So far three obstetricians on NCH's staff are using it, two more are getting ready and the hospital has the capability to have a total of 10 obstetricians using it, said Donna Hafner, senior informatics analyst with NCH.

"Our hospital is committed to technology," she said, adding that with use of online patient charting, more doctors are interested in using medical technology, especially when it helps them manage time between their practices and hospital duties and for improved patient safety. "From a risk management perspective, it is enormous. You can head problems off."

One of the biggest advantages comes when a hospital nurse has a concern about a change in the fetal heart monitor, Hartigan, of GE said. Rather than having to convey the concern over the phone to the doctor, the obstetrician can connect to the hospital's software system and see directly what's happening, he said.

Using the cell phone component of the PDA, the obstetrician calls into NCH's software, called OB Link, and can look up their patients' names or rooms and link to the fetal heart monitor strips in real time with four hours of recorded monitoring. They can check a patient's vital signs and access what nurses have written in the charts.

"I like it but I just started using it a few weeks ago," said Dr. Joseph Gauta, a Naples obstetrician. "I've used it five times. One time it saved me from having to go to the hospital. Other times I want to see what room a patient is in or what's happening."

Typically he has one or two patients in labor at any given time but that can shoot up to half a dozen when he is on call at the hospital. For the most part, patients aren't aware he can view the fetal heart monitor readouts from anywhere.

"Once in a while I tell them I'm watching your strips from home," he said. "They think it's exciting. They all thought it was neat."

The technology may help dispel a perception among patients that their doctor is out of touch when he or she isn't at the hospital at any given time, Hafner, of NCH, said.

Deliveries at North Naples hospital are steadily rising, up to 4,400 deliveries in 2006 — a 16 percent increase from 2005, she said.

"And there's a lot more high-risk patients," she said.

Since the AirStrip OB technology is so new, having just been approved by the Food and Drug Administration in early 2006, it's too early to say what impact it has had on catching early fetal distress to prevent adverse outcomes, Hartigan, with GE, said. Patient safety programs commonly point to communication shortcomings as a leading factor for adverse events, he said.

"Certainly this makes communication much more effective," he said.