



A Day in the Life of
Charles Colander
VP, Chief Information Officer
Elmhurst Memorial Hospital

IT Improves Efficiency, Care at Elmhurst Memorial Hospital

Constant change is a staple of Charles Colander's diet as chief information officer and a vice president at Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare.

The organization's flagship facility, Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, has been operating near the downtown area of the Chicago suburb since 1926. But it's in the midst of building a new 866,000-square-foot hospital on a site three miles south of its present location. It's also building two office buildings at that site, which will have another 200,000 square feet in space.

The new hospital gives Colander the opportunity to start from scratch and incorporate the latest in information technology infrastructure.

Improving Efficiency and Care

But Colander's involvement goes far beyond technical issues. Having a new facility gives Elmhurst Memorial a chance to study and re-examine the basic work processes of how healthcare is delivered, and he's been a part of that discussion as well.

"We're looking at how operations and new systems will be established for that building," he adds. "We have a number of teams and committees that are working on different aspects, everything from how patients arrive at the new facility to how they are directed to receive care, or how visitors are directed to see their friends and relatives. Even things like caregiver communication is all being rethought and redesigned based on the new building."

Information technology plays into efforts to improve efficiency, and thus Colander and his staff

play supportive roles in discussions about how to make improvements in operations, facilitated by IT.

"We have a process improvement group, and we've adopted Lean methodologies to help us identify improvement opportunities and then work through those pieces," he said. "Much has been done in the existing facility with existing processes and existing staff. We're also using those same techniques as we think about what we need to do as we go to the new building."

New to the CIO Role

Colander is new to the CIO role – he's been with Elmhurst Memorial one year. However, he's had wide and varied experience in IT and within healthcare over the last two decades.

"Early on, I decided that healthcare was where I wanted to spend my career," he said. "There was something about it that made you feel a little bit better about getting up every morning and going to work every day, knowing that what you were doing contributed to the greater good."

Before coming to Elmhurst, he was Chief Technology Officer for Northwestern Memorial Hospital. From 2004 to 2008, Colander was involved in the planning and development process for Prentice Women's Hospital, Northwestern's new facility in Chicago. That new building received accolades for the attention paid to work processes and the way information technology was incorporated into its design, and Colander hopes to bring the same insight to Elmhurst Memorial.

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As Colander has moved up the ranks into management of the information systems department, his time priorities have shifted. He estimates he spend about a third of his time working with his management team in information systems, helping them with any problems and keeping himself up to date on ongoing projects. Another third of his time is spent with executives in the system, as well as physician and nurse leadership.

Talking to Physicians about EMRs

Finally, he's been spending an increasing amount of time talking to physicians to help them with their practices' transition to use information technology for clinical records.

"We're talking to them about electronic medical records and systems, and what Elmhurst Memorial Hospital can do to help them with the adoption of EMRs in their practices," he said. "We discuss the things we're doing with community health networks and providing remote access capability and mobile devices for the doctors."

Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare operates a multispecialty clinic with 92 physicians in several sites in its service area, and they're using an electronic medical record system in a truly paperless environment for about six years.

As a stand-alone community hospital, Elmhurst Memorial will face challenges similar to many other hospitals in the country that are taking steps to implement computerized healthcare systems while working closely with community physicians who have admitting privileges at the facility. These physicians may have patients in more than one hospital, and it's difficult for them to adapt to different hospitals' systems.

On the inpatient side, Colander says Elmhurst has the beginnings of an electronic health record, and it's continuing down the path in incorporating electronic systems into clinical caregiving.

"There's some core things within clinical care that you need to define and put in place before you can be successful with any of these electronic health records systems," he said. "We're actively working to redesign our whole clinical documentation models, bringing in clinical research capabilities, and evidence-based care. We're marrying these things to clinical projects around relationship-based care models that our nursing staff has embraced."

In all, Colander's organization has faced some challenges because of the weak economy, but he believes this is an exciting time to be working in healthcare.

"The key is I have to assemble the right team and bring in the right expertise to make this happen," he added. "We've learned really quickly that these initiatives are more about designing best practices for clinical documentation, order sets and technology design than it is about the technology itself."