Once again, Nursing Economics is keeping its eyes on the horizon of contemporary nursing practice and is pleased to announce a new column entitled “Nursing Informatics (see page 204).” The decision to launch an information technology column was an easy one, and builds on an information systems and technology column previously featured in the journal. As nurse leaders, we recognize health care is our business and, as such, we must respond seamlessly to clinical changes in the patient-centered care that will be created, supported, and enabled by technology. Therefore, to ensure our readership of nurse executives, managers, and faculty stay informed and knowledgeable about health information technology (IT) and the essential informatics competencies required to function within the patient-care environment, we asked Judy Murphy, RN, FACMI, FHIMSS, vice president - information services, Aurora Health Care, Milwaukee, WI; a HIMSS Board Member; and a member of the federal HIT Standards Committee to lead and manage the column’s content.

Why Nurse Leaders Need to Stay Informed

It is our belief the use of IT to improve the efficiency, safety, and quality of health care delivery combined with the unique role of nursing warrants our undivided attention. Nursing leaders have a dual responsibility to develop systems in the world of IT to first, enable safer patient care and second, to support the work of managers and leaders by leveraging IT. Competency in clinical IT is an essential foundational tool for the leadership practice of managers and leaders and will become more important in the future as we develop more sophisticated clinical IT. This inaugural column of nursing informatics will act as a formidable reminder on how nursing informatics as a specialty (American Nurses Association, 2008), including the development of scope of practice, competencies, and certification has been invaluable to the nation’s health IT dialogue and nursing’s presence on federal IT boards and commissions (American Nurses Credentialing Center, n.d.). By including nursing informatics as a featured column, nurse leaders will have an opportunity to expand their understanding of the issues and importance surrounding IT system interoperability and health data exchanges including quality and patient safety, meaningful use, the TIGER Initiative (Technology Informatics Guiding Educational Reform), and the HITECH Act (Health IT for Economic and Clinical Health). The column will provide a place where nurse leaders can discover the latest information about health IT implementation issues such as electronic health records, decision support, standardized vocabularies, and evidence-based practice in automated care planning and documentation. Technology is only a means to an end and it can also contribute to nursing’s and health care’s strategic goal of safe and cost-effective patient-centered care. As technologies leverage and improve the workplace by providing data about the impact of nursing care, nurse leaders are able translate, synthesize, interpret, and manage the data into measurable outcomes.

Nursing Informatics and Patient-Center Care

We are on the edge of moving beyond the electronic health record to a dynamic, clinically intelligent system that can provide the nurse and other professionals with useable, evidence-based data at the point of care. There are many informed decisions that managers, chief nursing officers, and others in partnership with staff nurses need to make as we move into the new world of stimulus dollars. The implications of these decisions are of great financial and patient care concern now and in the long term. Nurse leaders need to be present at the tables where clinical IT is discussed and be key players in the decision making. However, that requires competency in the world of IT. Hence, this column was conceived as an endeavor to provide some of the information needed to build and maintain these skills for the nursing leader. “Meaningful use,” interoperability, and health data exchanges are examples of topics stimulated by the HITECH Act that need the attention of clinical nursing leadership.

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Timing Is Everything!

Ever since the passage of the Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, nurse leaders have come to recognize the promise made by President Obama when he committed federal funding of $19 billion in incentives allocated towards “meaningful use” of electronic health records (EHRs) in hospitals and ambulatory settings beginning in 2011 and ensuring that all medical records will be digitized by 2014. This commitment towards computerized health records will help avoid dangerous mistakes, reduce costs, and improve quality. The EHR helps connect and align patient-centered care into information that is distilled and used for good decision making towards improving quality and patient safety. We believe that launching the “Nursing Informatics” column will keep you connected and informed about meaningful, timely IT information for sound clinical decision making. We hope you believe so too. $

REFERENCES