Study Shows New Program Eases Burden on Emergency Departments

"Alameda Model" expedites psychiatric patient transfers

A study conducted at five Alameda County emergency departments shows that hospitals can reduce boarding times for psychiatric patients by coordinating care with a local psychiatric emergency services provider.

The study published in the Western Journal of Emergency Medicine analyzed a program called the ‘Alameda Model’ that used John George Psychiatric Hospital in San Leandro as a destination for local emergency departments handling patients with psychiatric problems. By coordinating emergency care with JGP Hospital—which is part of the Alameda Health System (AHS)—EDs were able to reduce by 80% the time psychiatric patients waited at the hospital before being transferred to a facility for mental health services.

“Patient boarding for long hours in emergency departments is a nationwide healthcare issue,” said Scott Zeller, MD, chief of psychiatric emergency services for AHS. “The Alameda Model focuses on immediate treatment at the outpatient level.”

The program launched in January 2013 involved five emergency departments in Alameda County and JGP Hospital, which served as the "regional dedicated emergency psychiatric facility" for the hospitals. The role of JGP Hospital was “to evaluate and treat all mental health patients for a given area and accept direct [patient] transfers from emergency departments.”

During the 30-day test period, a total of 144 patients with psychiatric problems were transferred from emergency departments at Alameda Hospital, San Leandro Hospital, Eden Hospital in Castro Valley, ValleyCare Hospital in Pleasanton, and St. Rose Hospital in Hayward. The five facilities were chosen because they are community hospitals with few resources to provide care for psychiatric patients.

During the 30-day period, the average boarding time for a patient with psychiatric problems before being transferred was one hour and 48 minutes, well below the state average of 10.5 hours and the four-hour boarding limit for EDs recommended by the Joint Commission. More than three-quarters of the
Study Shows cont.

patients (75.2%) were discharged from JGP Hospital without having to be admitted for inpatient care.

Zeller said the program, which has now been incorporated on a permanent basis at all five hospitals, provides EDs with a fixed destination for patients they’re unable to care for. “At many EDs, a patient in need of psychiatric care waits for hours while the staff dials phone numbers looking for a place to transfer them,” said Zeller. “With the Alameda Model, patients are getting the care they need in less than two hours and the majority of them can be treated and released.”

The California Hospital Association (CHA) said the study results show that programs like the Alameda Model work and should be incorporated in more counties. “There are programs operating in other counties that have a similar model of care and produce great results,” said Sheree Kruckenberg, CHA’s VP of behavioral health. “And they treat patients in a psychiatric crisis in a more humane way by getting them the care they need faster.” In a yet-to-be-released white paper, CHA is proposing that 10 counties launch similar psychiatric emergency service programs.

The programs can work particularly well for California hospitals because the state is one of the few in the United States with a Medicaid billing code for psychiatric Crisis Stabilization, which helps expedite the transfer process for Medi-Cal patients. Since launching the study earlier this year, Zeller said he has been working the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to encourage the formation of a national Crisis Stabilization billing code.

"Only a few states have a Crisis Stabilization code for Medicaid," said Zeller. "And Medicare doesn't have one at all. So getting a national code in place would really help promote the formation of programs like this in other parts of the country." —DOUG DESJARDINS

Covered California to Expand Website Offerings in November

Provider directory to include hospitals and physician groups

Covered California officials acknowledged the online health insurance exchange had a "glitchy" first month but said most problems have been ironed out or are in the process of being resolved.

At its first board meeting since the Oct. 1 launch of Covered California, the board addressed a number of issues including problems with its provider
Covered California cont.

directory, its section for small businesses, and renewed calls for the website to post health plan ratings. Despite the problems, officials said the exchange was able to launch enrollment for nearly 180,000 individuals in its first four weeks.

“We are not perfect, but we’re doing a pretty damn good job,” said Peter Lee, executive director for the state’s health insurance marketplace. Covered California board member Robert Ross described the first several weeks as a sometimes “glitchy beginning” but added that “I don’t know how anything this size wouldn’t be like that.”

During its first four weeks of business, Covered California started 179,562 individual applications for insurance but said figures on how many applications have been completed will not be available until mid-November. It also reported that its website received 2.15 million unique visits during that time and that its call centers fielded 210,061 calls.

The first major problem the site encountered was with its provider directory, which had content errors and slow response times forcing Covered California to shut it down for nearly two weeks. But the service that allows consumers to search for physicians participating in various health plans was restored Oct. 21 and will be expanded in November.

“Right now, the directory allows users to search for physicians by city or ZIP code,” said Anne Gonzalez, a spokesperson for Covered California. “By the end of November, the directory will be expanded to include hospitals, physician groups, and medical groups.”

Another problem area has been the Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP), which allows small businesses with fewer than 50 employees to purchase group plans. For now, business owners can search for plans and get quotes online but have to contact a SHOP representative to actually sign up for a plan. “The self-serve option on the website isn’t working right now but should be up and running by mid-November,” said Gonzalez.

Covered California officials are also working on a strategy to post some type of health plan quality ratings online. In October, Kaiser Permanente, Sharp Health Plan and Western Health Advantage sent a letter to the Covered California board requesting that quality ratings created by the state Office of the Patient Advocate (OPA) be posted online.

“The problem is that the OPA ratings represent only three of the 12 insurers selling plans on the site,” said Gonzalez. “So if we posted those ratings, it would reflect negatively on the nine other plans that aren’t represented.”

As an alternative, the board directed Covered California staff to explore the option of posting consumer feedback ratings of health plans rather than formal ratings. “Those ratings would represent 10 of the 12 health plans on the exchange, so that’s something the board will consider at its next meeting in November,” said Gonzalez. —DOUG DESJARDINS
IN BRIEF Continued from page 3

along with her on-the-ground experience will be invaluable.” The appointment must still be confirmed by state legislators before it is official.

Kaiser Permanente has rented out retail space for small storefronts dedicated to helping people enroll for healthcare coverage on Covered California. The ShopKP initiative launched Oct. 1 includes sites in San Jose, Modesto, Sacramento, and Fresno. The small retail stores are staffed by certified enrollment navigators licensed by the California Department of Insurance to assist consumers in signing up for healthcare coverage. Kaiser has tentative plans to open a ShopKP site in Stockton by the end of the year.

Keck Medicine of USC and Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian announced a partnership to establish a comprehensive cancer care and oncology program. The partnership will team the Orange County-based Hoag Family Cancer Institute, which treats more than 3,000 cancer patients each year, with the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center in Los Angeles, one of the state’s largest academic cancer centers. “We’re joining the best of academic medicine with the best of private practice,” said Thomas Jackiewicz, CEO of USC Health. “This partnership ensures that the best care will be delivered locally whenever possible, while also offering treatment at Keck Medicine of USC if needed.” Jackiewicz said the partnership will provide Hoag patients with the opportunity

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TOP STORIES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

California Hospitals Report Data Breach Involving 729,000 Records
Information stored on two stolen laptop computers

An Alhambra-based hospital network reported a major data breach involving more than 700,000 patient records that were stolen from a secure location with video surveillance.

AHMC Healthcare reported the theft of two laptop computers containing the personal health information of approximately 729,000 patient records on Oct. 14. The patient data includes patient names, insurance identification numbers, insurance and patient payments, and procedure codes.

“We regret any inconvenience or concern this incident may cause our patients,” said AHMC in a statement. The statement added that “although there is no evidence the information was accessed or used in any manner, it cannot be ruled out.”

The theft affected patients who have been treated at Garfield Medical Center, Monterey Park Hospital, Greater El Monte Community Hospital, Whittier Hospital Medical Center, San Gabriel Valley Medical Center, and Anaheim Regional Medical Center.

AHMC spokesman Gary Hopkins said the two laptop computers were password-protected but that the medical data stored on them was not encrypted. He said the health system is now in the process of expediting a program to encrypt all patient medical records.

Video surveillance footage showed that a thief broke into a locked and video-monitored office on the sixth floor of an AHMC building and stole the computers on Oct. 12. Alhambra police on Oct. 23 arrested a 36-year-old transient man in connection with the theft but have not yet recovered the laptops.

According to the California Data Breach Report 2012, healthcare providers in California reported 19 data breaches to the state Attorney General in 2012, or 15% of the 131 total breaches reported. As an industry, healthcare reported the third-highest total of breaches last year behind retail and finance. Data breaches last year involved an average of 22,500 personal records.

While data breaches involving medical records are not uncommon, many of the thefts don’t directly target patient records. “In a majority of cases, the people stealing the laptops with medical data on them have no idea what’s on the hard drive,” said Lois Richardson, vice president of privacy, legal publications, and education for the California Hospital Association. “They’re usually just interested in stealing the computer.”

While the AHMC theft constitutes a major breach, it isn’t the largest healthcare data breach of 2013. In August, Illinois-based Advocate Medical Group reported the theft of four laptop computers containing the medical records of nearly 4 million patients. —DOUG DESJARDINS

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to participate in clinical trials testing new cancer treatments at USC. Burton Eisenberg, MD, has been appointed executive medical director of the new program. Eisenberg most recently served as deputy director of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Norris Cotton Cancer Center in New Hampshire.

Cedars-Sinai awarded $3.3 million in grants to organizations in Los Angeles dedicated to community health education and safety. The largest grant of $1.5 million went to Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science to launch a program to help educate future healthcare providers in South Los Angeles. Also receiving grants are the Saban Community Clinic, Venice Family Clinic, Planned Parenthood of Los Angeles, and the Maple Counseling Center. “These grants focus on infrastructure to help strengthen and sustain organizations that share Cedars-Sinai’s commitment to building a stronger, healthier community,” said Thomas M. Priselac, president and CEO of Cedars-Sinai.

The Rhode Island Attorney General has approved the sale of Landmark Medical Center to Prime Healthcare Services. “An enormous amount of dedication and commitment from so many has produced today’s accomplishment,” said Landmark CEO Rick Charest. As part of the acquisition, Prime has agreed to spend $30 million to upgrade the 214-bed hospital located in Woonsocket. Both Landmark and Prime are targeting Nov. 30 as a closing date for the transaction. Based in the city of Ontario, Prime now operates 14 hospitals in California and nine hospitals in four other states.

One of the state’s largest psychiatric hospitals has reduced the number of new patients it will accept and temporarily closed a special unit due to a shortage of psychiatrists. Atascadero State Hospital, a maximum security prison with 1,275 beds, has reduced admissions from 24 patients per week to 15 patients per week, according to a report in the San Luis Obispo Tribune. Ralph Montano, a spokesman for the Department of State Hospitals (DSH), said Atascadero currently has 22 psychiatrists, 33% fewer than it had in 2012. He added that the DSH is “making every effort to recruit psychiatrists and anticipates lifting the suspension soon.” DSH said finding and retaining psychiatrists at Atascadero is difficult due in part to its remote location.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has released a new Personal Belief Exemption (PBE) form for parents or guardians who want to exempt children from childhood vaccinations required by state law. The new PBE form must be signed by the parent or guardian and a healthcare professional who has advised them about the benefits of vaccinations and the risks involved in not receiving them. “The CDPH encourages parents to get their children vaccinated, as it is the best and safest way to prevent many serious, often deadly diseases in children,” said CDPH director Ron Chapman, MD. “It’s important that parents make an informed decision and this new PBE form encourages education about vaccinations while protecting an individual’s constitutional rights.”

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Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are being offered for this conference from the California Board of Registered Nursing, the Compliance Certification Board, and the National Association of Medical Staff Services (NAMSS).

You can access the ICE 2013 Annual Conference Online Registration Site by clicking on the following link: [https://www.iceforhealth.org/eventdetail2.asp?eid=61](https://www.iceforhealth.org/eventdetail2.asp?eid=61)

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San Joaquin Community Health Information Exchange (SJCHIE)

SUMMARY
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RESPONSIBILITIES
Enhance and implement strategic vision and operational model.
• Ensure financial sustainability of SJCHIE, from acquisition of grant-based funding and developing and implementing a sustainable self-supporting financial model for ongoing operations. • Understand the evolving health information market and health care delivery system trends that provide opportunities for revenue-generating services and initiatives to sustain long term growth. • Maintain situational awareness of state legislative and political dynamics within the context of HIE. • Develop membership growth plan and balances the needs of the financial model and member satisfaction. • Build and maintain relationships with key industry, government, and interstate stakeholders, and clinicians • Provide a progressive, proactive and engaging presence for SJCHIE by representing its mission and programs. Provide regular communications on SJCHIE progress to the Governing Board and key stakeholders.
• Responsible for consistent and responsive delivery of SJCHIE’s technology through a partnership with IIEHIE. • Refine and execute a proposed work plan annually based on Operational and Implementation plans. • Develop metric-driven reporting for the Board. • Ensure sound financial management and accountability. • Assure compliance with all state and local law.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE
Required: Bachelor’s degree from an accredited university. Preferred: Advanced degree preferred in health care policy, public health, business administration, or a closely related field.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES
Required: Strong knowledge of the healthcare and managed care industry, its products, services and major business processes. • Good leadership, with the ability to establish direction and build alliances. • Strong assessment and analytical skills, with ability to determine key issues, and develop actions plans. • Strong collaboration skills, with demonstrated ability to create a collaborative work environment. • Strong facilitation, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. • Strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships. • Strong oral and written communication skills, with the ability to communicate information professionally. • Strong presentation skills, including the ability to tailor presentations to a specific audience.

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