

Innovative device contracts improve patient care and satisfaction at Erie County Medical Center

Erie County Medical Center Buffalo, N.Y.

Erie County Medical Center, a 602-bed academic medical center, is at the forefront of research and innovation in its area. It is the regional center for trauma, burn care, behavioral health, transplantation and medical rehabilitation, and includes centers of excellence for transplantation and kidney care, behavioral health, and oncology. The health system includes on- and off-campus primary care and family health centers, more than 30 outpatient specialty care services, and a 390-bed long-term care facility.

Challenge

Health care organizations now view patient satisfaction through a wider, and yet more focused lens due to the onset of value-based care reimbursement and specifically, Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey results.

The pharmacy team at Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) is taking a multipronged approach to improve patient satisfaction scores—beginning with improving post-surgical pain. In general, ECMC is transitioning away from patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) pumps largely due to mobility concerns. Increasingly shorter surgical lengths of stay, particularly in orthopedics, demand rapid mobilization. IV poles and PCA pumps can be tripping hazards, and they often impede physical and occupational therapists while treating patients.

From a financial perspective, ECMC's older PCA pumps need replacing. "If we could decrease our number of pumps from 50 to 25, that means significant purchase savings, plus ongoing savings in terms of maintenance agreements, repair costs and everything else that goes along with owning those pumps," said Randy Gerwitz, ECMC's director of pharmaceutical services.

Along with enhancing patient satisfaction by improving the post-surgical pain experience, the pharmacy team has a long-term concern. "We're being challenged by outside agencies and advisory groups that part of the narcotic epidemic is influenced by what happens in hospitals, the therapies we provide and the duration of those therapies after discharge," said Gerwitz. "It's not solely our problem, but hospitals certainly contribute to it." ECMC wants to use post-surgical pain protocols that help to diminish the narcotic epidemic.

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Randy Gerwitz
Director of Pharmaceutical Services

Solution

Facing value-based reimbursement, a financial desire to use fewer PCA pumps, and a need for a less impeding pain management device, Gerwitz and an ECMC anesthesiologist followed several novel PCA entities for years as they progressed through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) pipeline. Concurrently, pharmacy contract leadership at Vizient was also closely monitoring the status of early-stage drug delivery technologies, in keeping with its goal to bring the latest advancements to Vizient Pharmacy Program members.

Despite a variety of available products in the market, IONSYS® (fentanyl iontophoretic transdermal system) CII, from Vizient-awarded supplier The Medicines Company, was always a front-runner. The device, featured at the Vizient 2016 Innovative Technology Expo, has been on contract since July 2015.

IONSYS is the first needle-free, patient-controlled, preprogrammed fentanyl delivery system for short-term management of acute, post-operative pain in adult patients requiring opioid analgesia in the hospital. Typically applied to the upper, outer arm or chest, IONSYS eliminates all PCA pump-related mobility concerns.

“IONSYS is convenient and easy to use, and it’s attractive from the perspective of minimizing patients’ narcotic exposure and not sending them home on the same therapy that we have them on in the hospital,” said Gerwitz. Only hospitals enrolled in the IONSYS Risk Evaluation Mitigation Strategy (REMS) program can administer IONSYS to patients. Hospitals in the program agree not to allow patients to leave the acute care setting with IONSYS. The REMS program goal is to mitigate the risk of respiratory depression resulting from accidental exposure to IONSYS.

Results

Word of ECMC’s successful IONSYS pilot project quickly spread throughout the health system—and beyond. Initially, some physicians expressed skepticism. “Then we saw patients, particularly those with prior orthopedic surgeries, tell their providers that they were much more comfortable than with their previous surgeries” said Gerwitz.

Other local hospitals are reaching out to Gerwitz, inquiring about how “a little extra money per case” initiated such change. “Our surgeons are telling their surgeons about their good outcomes with IONSYS, and their peers want to know all about it—so it’s certainly driven conversation within our community.”

While still early, IONSYS anecdotal evidence and feedback are positive from patients, nursing staff and providers. One unanticipated benefit is that nursing staff no longer spend time administering individual patient doses, allowing them to refocus valuable time elsewhere.

Staying on the cusp of new technology

Although Gerwitz will maintain a watchful eye on developing products in the marketplace, he notes that he’ll continue to rely heavily on Vizient for uncovering the best technology options. Vizient monitors and evaluates future products and technologies to help members gain an invaluable competitive advantage—particularly with procedures where patients can often choose their facility. Getting a jump on new technologies also helps providers ensure they maximize the total value of their interventions and care, including speed to recovery and overall health of the patient.



For more information please contact pharmacyquestions@vizientinc.com.

“If your patients provide word-of-mouth endorsements for experiences they had with your organization, that can essentially drive business to you, which could have gone to a different provider,” said Gerwitz.

Gerwitz, who meets with his Vizient regional client executive regularly, encourages members to maximize Vizient resource connections and stay on the cutting edge of new options that enhance care delivery. “Medicine is changing so rapidly, and it’s extremely difficult to stay on top of everything, from a regulatory perspective to changing peer models to new therapeutic entities like IONSYS,” he said. “Having the robust team at Vizient providing fair assessments—a scientific approach as to the quality and value of products—is incredibly helpful.”

Gerwitz said because hospital staff have limited time, most often visits from vendor marketing representatives are curtailed, thus Vizient fulfills the need for quickly getting new product information. “New devices aren’t brought to us at the same rate they were even four or five years ago, and the marketing focus has changed to reach practitioners outside the hospital,” he said. “We often don’t know what’s being said to physicians, and that’s part of the reason there’s often a gap before we realize a new product is available. So we lean very heavily on Vizient to bring those new opportunities to us.”

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