



Katina Tengesdal/MDN

Jeremy Schoneberg, information technology director for the Heart of America Medical Center, is seen with the Northwest Alliance for Information Technology hardware. All hospitals in the NWAIT consortium store their electronic medical record data on this hardware.

Sharing is cost effective

Rugby acts as a center for medical records information technology

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Heart of America Medical Center in Rugby was one of the first rural hospitals to begin implementing electronic medical records. Now, the hospital is a central point, storing hardware used by other rural hospitals as a part of the Northwest Alliance for Information Technology.

"In the last couple of years, we have gotten together with several other hospitals in the state, because we realized implementation was cost prohibitive. The most expensive part was the hardware," said Jeremy Schoneberg, information technology director for the Heart of America Medical Center.

"We put together a data center where all the hospitals share the hardware. We have it centrally located here in Rugby. All of the servers and hardware reside here," he added.

The hospitals that make up the NWAIT consortium are St. Aloisius Medical Center in Harvey, St. Andrews Health Center in Bottineau, Towner County Medical Center in Cando, St. Luke's Hospital in Crosby, Presentation Medical Center in Rolla, Mountrail County Medical Center in Stanley, Tioga

Medical Center in Tioga, and McKenzie County Healthcare Systems Hospital in Watford City.

"Every hospital has their own configurations. Each hospital is in different stages of implementing. The hardware is shared, but the databases and the records are separate," Schoneberg said.

The hardware for all of the hospitals is stored in a single case, located in a room offsite from the Heart of America Medical Center. The room has an uninterrupted power supply, with a power generator in case the building loses power. The room also has its own cooling and fire suppression systems. A back-up archive of data is stored off site.

For the Heart of America Medical Center, Schoneberg explained, the implementation of electronic medical records began in 2006 with the hospital looking at different software vendors.

"We had a group of different disciplines looking with us, including the nursing and pharmacy departments. We visited several different vendors and looked at how they functioned. We then went through a deliberation on which one to choose," Schoneberg said.

"At that time, we were only looking at replacing our financial system. The electronic medical records were

just a bonus on top of that. From there, we generally didn't install all the applications at once," he added.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has since aggressively promoted the meaningful use of electronic medical records in hospitals. In order to receive incentive payments, hospitals must meet certain dead-

lines to achieve meaningful use.

"There are mandatory steps that we need to take to have it all in place by a certain time frame," Schoneberg said.

The first clinical departments online at the Heart of America Medical Center were the lab and radiology departments, with acute care

following shortly after. Most departments are now using electronic medical records, including the business office and long-term care.

Now, the hospital is working at implementing the records in the clinics.

While the implementation process has had its ups and downs, Schoneberg remains optimistic that the

technology will continue to improve.

"The software itself, since we've been using it, has gotten easier for users. We've gotten better at working through the issues. There are some complaints of functionality to the vendor, but I think they're moving in the right direction," Schoneberg said.

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