

Summary of the November, 2008, Program

Developing A Connected Healthcare Community

Speaker: David Willis M.D., Medical Director, Ocala West Family Medicine

Dr. David Willis gave a presentation at the November 9, 2008 meeting of the North Central Florida Post Polio Group regarding a new secure on-line database that may revolutionize the way patient information can be obtained by doctors and emergency personnel.

Dr. Willis spoke with us about the history of how the “Healthy Ocala Project” came about.

Dr. Melvin Seek is a practicing kidney specialist in Ocala and he has been working on projects like this for about 10 years. The technology has developed where doctors can gather information in a cost-effective way, sharing medical information and data appropriately and securely. Dr. Seek, Dr. Willis and a panel of other local doctors have been trying to look at the issue of how much it costs in medical care and how fragmented our medical system is and what they can do to bring it all together to create efficiency and safety for patients and to provide more care more accurately and more timely.

It is estimated that eighty percent of our health care budget goes for those over 65, those with chronic diseases and for neo-natal care for premature births. Thirty percent of the money spent on health care goes to the one percent of the population that have chronic disease. And then twenty-five percent of care can go for those in the last year of life.

They are a cottage industry in medicine, its very much small little practices that are trying to stay together, yet it is very fragmented. There’s a lack of preventive care that then leads to a lot of unnecessary acute care. A great example of this is congestive heart failure. Many of the acute episodes of congestive heart failure can be prevented with better management of medication, salt intake, and other treatment.

Several years back, Dr. Seek developed a heart failure treatment center that used a nurse-practitioner separate from the regular physicians. And in addition to what the regular physicians, cardiologists, primary care doctors, were doing, this clinic looked in on those patients more regularly with education and with interventions and little things along the way. On average a person will get readmitted to the hospital after a congestive heart failure episode fifteen percent of the time. In Marion County, if you are part of the Congestive Heart Failure Treatment Center, with these little extra steps, your readmission rate is less than one percent. So it was a dramatic improvement by bringing together some specialized care, primary care, cardiology care and patient education. And it was done through technology over the internet. So when something was done in one office, access was given to other doctors on the computer so that everyone could participate, communicate and be up to speed. This clearly demonstrated how this new technology can work.

They are hoping that the Healthy Ocala Project will improve the communication that the doctors have with one another and then address some of the waste, duplication and opportunities for litigation due to errors.

In 2007 the Public Policy Institute of Ocala, sponsored by the Economic Development Council and Central Florida Community College, addressed the issue of access to health care. Out of this study, there was a big community impetus for developing our regional health informational organization, Healthy Ocala, to get information from a technology standpoint exchanged. They wanted to get all of the computers, data systems, all the things that the doctors and hospitals were using and bring them together. The idea is to build them up, provide technology to those that don't have it and then interconnect them all so that they all talk to one another. There are people from all over Marion County, not just doctors and hospitals that are interested in developing this program.

The infrastructure necessary to make this communication system happens include doctors, hospitals, computer technology, computer programs, and education and training programs.

As a patient, you will decide who has access to your records. It will be like a safety deposit box of information about you. Your records will include doctors notes, x-ray information, lab work, immunizations, medications, hospital stays, digital transcriptions, outpatient visits; in other words, everything your doctor or emergency medical team needs to make better, safer and more accurate decisions in treating you.

In addition, as a member of this project, you will have the opportunity to go on line and look up information on your medications through your pharmacy, your health files, and have access to a medical library and obtain nursing level advice. You will eventually be able to communicate with your physician via e-mail!

Prestige 55 has currently been working to enroll people in this program. In 2009, the program will be open to anyone who wishes to enroll. No one else can enroll you, it has to be your decision and you do not have to have a computer to enroll. You will not be asked to provide your social security number or your Medicare number. You will have a private membership number through Healthy Ocala and you will be the only one to decide who will have access to your information.

This is a program that may well become a prototype for other communities to follow in providing superior medical care to all individuals. We at North Central Florida Post Polio Group thank Dr. Willis for introducing us to this worthwhile program.

Summarized by Sharon Daszczyński