



Midwest Hospital Leads Nation's Use of Revolutionary Robot to Increase Patient-Physician Communication

MERRIAM, Kan., July 27, 2005 – It's no surprise that nationally recognized hospitals located on the fast-paced East Coast or trend-setting West Coast are known for their state-of-the-art health care facilities and equipment. However, many people would never expect that one of today's most revolutionary pieces of medical technology – the RP-6™ telerounding robot – is being most highly utilized at a Midwest hospital.

Physicians at Shawnee Mission Medical Center, located in suburban Kansas City, are using four robots – named REMi, Rolbot, Romeo and Gort by hospital physicians and staff – to increase patient-physician communication. This technology has led to improved physician efficiency, quality of care and patient satisfaction. Shawnee Mission Medical Center is one of only 12 hospitals in the country to utilize the robot and is the only facility nationwide to use multiple robots throughout virtually every area of the hospital.

“The robots provide physicians with an opportunity to increase physician-to-patient communication, which is crucial for consistently delivering high quality care,” said internationally recognized general surgeon Joseph Petelin, MD, who regularly uses REMi to communicate with patients during evenings and weekends. “The robots offer both physicians and patients increased access to each other beyond traditional in-room visits.”

The 5-foot 4-inch robots, manufactured by InTouch Health® of Santa Barbara, Calif., look similar to large vacuum cleaners with flat-screen computer monitors mounted on top as the “head.” Connected to the Internet via the hospital's secure wireless network, the RP-6™ system includes a two-way video feed, a microphone and a speaker. When in use, the physician's face is displayed on the computer monitor. Each robot is guided by a physician using a joystick from a computerized ControlStation™ in another location, most often the physician's home or office.

“The RP-6 robot is one of only a few pieces of equipment available today that is useful to virtually every physician in our hospital, regardless of specialty,” said Samuel H. Turner, Sr., hospital President and CEO. “Our four robots are currently being utilized by physicians in the Emergency Department, Intensive Care Unit, Joint & Spine Care Center, and our Cardiac Care Center.”

The robots have also allowed physicians to more efficiently move patients through the discharge process by improving throughput, which is critical for the hospital as it is often at capacity. For example, a ControlStation in the Cath Lab allows internationally recognized cardiologist Paul Kramer, MD, to visit and discharge patients in between cases rather than waiting until after the day's procedures are complete.

“Most patients are eager to get home after a hospital stay, and many times my schedule does not allow me to discharge them in a timely manner once I have begun Cath Lab cases,” said Kramer. “The robot allows me to personally discharge my patients in between cases so they have a quicker opportunity to continue their recovery at home.”

Shawnee Mission physicians are participating in surveys after using any of the units. This feedback has identified the following results.

- 96 percent of physicians said the technology allows them to advance or improve patient care and learn more about their patient's condition.
- 88 percent of physicians said the robots save time, increasing their overall efficiency
- Three out of four physicians said the systems allow them to accelerate the time of patient discharge

High Tech, High Touch

The use of the RP-6 robots at Shawnee Mission Medical Center is not meant to replace important daily interaction between patients and physicians. Rather, they serve as an extension to traditional patient-physician interaction, improving communication and increasing patient (and family) satisfaction.

“I found it very reassuring that I was able to communicate with my own physician about my discharge plans,” said Petelin’s patient, Larry D’Angelo, of Mission, Kan. “Since Dr. Petelin was not at the hospital, one of his colleagues would have normally given me the information. I felt more comfortable that my physician – who was aware of my condition and had been with me each step of the way – was in charge of every aspect of my care.”

Traditionally, Pulmonologist Michael Nelson, MD, would call the hospital around 10 p.m. each night to check the status of his patients in the Intensive Care Unit. He would receive updates from nurses or would talk to patients on the telephone, if their condition allowed. The robots now allow him to make an additional set of rounds throughout the unit each night and personally communicate with his patients, rather than simply talking to them over the telephone.

“Patients and their families want as much access as possible to their physician for direct consultation and care,” said Nelson. “I think patients appreciate that I can get back ‘in front’ of them more frequently, rather than waiting for the next day’s visit.”

Change of Heart

Petelin first approached Turner in January about the possibility of obtaining an RP-6, however Turner wasn’t initially convinced that the robot could deliver the tremendous benefits it boasted.

“I was a little skeptical in the beginning because I wanted to make certain our patients truly felt they were receiving extra communication with their physician, rather than feeling as though the robot had replaced the traditional in-room visit,” said Turner. “In addition, I was unsure if our physicians would utilize the system on a regular basis after the initial excitement wore off.”

Since The Foundation for Shawnee Mission Medical Center purchased REMi in March, the overwhelmingly positive reaction from physicians, hospital staff and patients created the need for additional robots to satisfy the high demand for the system. In response, the Foundation supported the purchase of three more robots, which arrived in June. The Foundation has a history of supporting the purchase of cutting-edge technology. In 2002, it funded the \$1 million purchase of the da Vinci surgical system, the first such technology in the region.

“I couldn’t be more pleased about the positive feedback we’ve received since the robots arrived,” said Turner. “Shawnee Mission Medical Center is known throughout Kansas City for providing the highest quality patient care possible, and the robots are another example of our dedication to that commitment. I’m thrilled that we’re caring for our patients with the same state-of-the-art equipment as nationally recognized hospitals. I don’t know if anyone would have ever expected a hospital in Kansas to be leading the nation in the use of this revolutionary technology.”

About Shawnee Mission Medical Center

Shawnee Mission Medical Center (ShawneeMission.org) is a 383-bed facility located in suburban Kansas City. As the second-largest hospital in the metropolitan area, our medical professionals treat nearly 20,000 inpatients and 180,000 outpatients each year. Shawnee Mission Medical Center has the busiest Emergency Department in Johnson County, the area’s first accredited Chest Pain Emergency Center, a nationally recognized Center for Women’s Health and delivers more babies each year than any other hospital in the Kansas City metropolitan area. In addition, it employs more than 2,800 local residents and supports an exceptional staff of more than 750 physicians representing 50 medical specialties, the largest medical staff in Kansas City.

About InTouch Health

InTouch Health is a privately held company based in Santa Barbara, Calif. InTouch Health provides technology solutions, which dramatically increase the effectiveness of health care professionals. The company is addressing the impending demographic crisis in acute care by pioneering the use of Remote Presence™ in health care with its RP-6 Robotic System. Through a proprietary communications and mobile robotic platform, skilled medical professionals are projected to other settings where a patient or caregiver is located to provide care, coach and train staff, or monitor health care services. The InTouch Health solution leverages the time and expertise of health care professionals across multiple care facilities, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of care delivery.