An extra layer of care when it’s needed most

St. Elizabeth uses technology to deliver higher level of intensive care

The Intensive Care Unit. It’s not any place you ever really want to be, but if your health demands it, you should demand the very best and most critical level of expertise and service.

That’s how we feel at St. Elizabeth. That’s why this spring, we are implementing the Advanced ICU Care tele-ICU program, a leading-edge solution that helps enhance the level of ICU care you and your loved ones obtain around the clock.

But what exactly is a “tele-ICU” and what does it mean for your health? Basically, a tele-ICU is a high-tech way of delivering top-notch intensive care experts directly to your bedside at any time of day or night. Through our tele-ICU program, St. Elizabeth stations critical care physicians, called “intensivists,” in the ICU every second of the day, via the latest technology.

From their central, off-site location, the Advanced ICU Care intensivists continuously monitor patient data — including vital signs, medications, lab results and trends in patients’ clinical status — and collaborate with the bedside critical care team. These highly trained physicians use an array of sophisticated technology to track patients and identify problems before they become urgent or complications develop.

To communicate, the remote and on-site teams use two-way audiovisual communication for face-to-face consultations with patients, bedside physicians and nurses at any time of day or night.

“The tele-ICU program has greatly improved care for patients in the hospitals in which it exists, where data shows patients have 25 percent shorter hospital stays and 40 percent lower mortality.”
When, where and why is St. Elizabeth starting its tele-ICU program?

At press time, St. Elizabeth was scheduled to begin its tele-ICU program in late April at St. Elizabeth Edgewood, Florence and Ft. Thomas to provide the highest level of care to as many as 62 patients daily in the three hospitals. The program was started to enhance the level of care we provide, since research shows tele-ICU programs significantly improve patient well-being, while reducing complications, deaths, and the amount of time patients must stay in our hospitals.

How does this type of program help the critically ill patient?

The tele-ICU program provides an extra level of care that ensures patients are closely monitored every second of the day by an additional team of critical care clinicians, overseen by the Advanced ICU Care intensivists. With this constant level of highly skilled care, key changes in a patient’s condition are detected at the earliest opportunity, which ultimately improves our patients’ outcomes. Likewise, the tele-ICU gives on-site nurses and physicians an extra level of immediate support precisely when it is needed.

How does the program work?

A team of 30 board-certified intensivists, 50 critical care nurses, and 10 nurse practitioners and physician assistants at the remote Advanced ICU Care Monitoring Center are connected to each patient’s bedside via a real-time link, which provides full access to patients’ electronic medical records, clinician notes and diagnostic studies. These state-licensed members of St. Elizabeth’s medical staff monitor vital signs, ventilator settings, oxygenation and heart monitors and can initiate or change treatment in collaboration with the patient’s physician, as needed, based on patients’ immediate needs and the best practices of evidence-based medicine. This additional level of care is provided as a supplement to the already close and constant monitoring by St. Elizabeth’s on-site team of medical professionals.

How do tele-ICU doctors communicate with patients and staff at St. Elizabeth, and what happens if they detect a problem in the patient?

The tele-ICU team actually talks with the on-site team and the patient via state-of-the-art two-way audiovisual technology in each room. Both teams can immediately detect and respond to any emergency the instant it occurs. In fact, if a member of the on-site treatment team has a question or concern for the tele-ICU team, they can immediately communicate with them through a bedside camera and monitor. However, to protect each patient’s privacy, it should be noted that cameras and microphones are only activated when needed.

I know there are critical care doctors in the ICU at St. Elizabeth, but why can’t they be on-site around the clock, too?

Unfortunately, the nation is suffering from a shortage of physicians who specialize in this field. Thankfully, an organization called, Advanced ICU Care®, is providing this service to St. Elizabeth and approximately 30 other hospitals across the country as an innovative and very effective solution. In fact, the tele-ICU program has greatly improved care for patients in the hospitals in which it exists, where data shows patients have 25 percent shorter hospital stays and 40 percent lower mortality. And all this additional care is being provided at no additional cost to the patient at St. Elizabeth Healthcare.

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