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Times-News

Twin Falls, Idaho

Monday, March 05, 2018

Laurie Welch

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Intermountain Healthcare opens hospital without walls

BURLEY — With a few strokes of a computer keyboard, critical care nurse Helen McClure can access specialty physicians and nurses who have a wide range of expertise.

Intermountain Healthcare, parent company of Cassia Regional Hospital, has launched one of the nation's largest virtual hospitals. The hospital, called Intermountain Connect Care Pro, brings together 35 telehealth programs and more than 500 caregivers.

Connect Care Pro provides basic medical care, along with advanced services like stroke evaluation, newborn critical care, mental health counseling and intensive care.

"It means that people have access to specialties in the community without having to travel to Boise or Salt Lake City," said Ben Smalley, Cassia Regional Hospital administrator.

The system improves patient care by giving local doctors and patients access to the specialists and saves the patients money since they don't have to travel to another city for care. It also saves the hospitals money.

"But most importantly," Stephanie Curtis, spokeswoman for CRH, said, "The quality of care is much higher."

CRH implemented an oncology portion of the system in November and wound care was implemented this week.

Conversations about how the hospital can further utilize the system are occurring daily, Smalley said.

"One of the challenges you have with small communities is that they can't support the specialists," Smalley said. "This gives the community access to that neurologist or other specialist and it helps relieve the financial burden for the hospitals because the cost is spread across the hospitals."

With the program, one infant in a southern Utah hospital received critical care consultation that allowed the baby to stay at the same facility instead of being transferred to Salt Lake City. The transfer would have cost more than \$18,000.

On Friday, the face of Crystal Hale, Intermountain Connect Care Pro clinical coordinator, pops up on a large television monitor mounted on the wall of a CRH intensive care room. A camera mounted on the ceiling in the room covers the patient's bed and reveals everyone in the room.

Virtual hospital

Helen McClure, critical care nurse at Cassia Regional hospital, connects with Intermountain Connect Care Pro on Friday in the critical care unit.

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Hale zooms the camera's lens in on Smalley's eyes to demonstrate the image quality available for use in examination of a patient.

Hale, a seasoned nurse with a master's degree and 30 years of experience does patient rounds for Intermountain's hospitals and provides services to five other medical facilities. She works from a non-hospital building in Midvale, Utah.

"Our goal is to keep patients close to home and their families if we can," Hale said.

The specialists have access to all of the patient's records and they can have virtual consults with the treating physicians.

There are plans to extend the services for use in under-served areas, according to a press release issued by Intermountain Healthcare. Discussions are underway to put patient kiosks in locations like homeless shelters, schools, jails or community centers.

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