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PORTER MEDICAL CENTER has begun converting to an integrated electronic health records system that will improve patient care and make communication easier for both doctors and staff. Christine Mulholland, the former office manager at Bristol Internal Medicine, is working on the project as Porter's LSS software implementation specialist.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

## Reader Comments

Here's what one reader has to say about us!

A reader from Middlebury, Vt., writes, "Still enjoy each edition, the special "guides", fall, holiday, etc. are very helpful & informative. Trent Campbell's photos (and captions) are great."

*Quotes are taken from reader comments submitted with subscription renewals.*



## Hospital files electronic records

New technologies should save time in emergency room

MIDDLEBURY — Work is under way to turn the Middlebury area into one of the most connected communities in Vermont, when it comes to medical records. By early 2012, Middlebury residents will experience the seamless transfer of information between their physician's office and Porter Medical Center, increasing efficiency and improving patient care.

Porter Medical Center and the 11 physician practices owned by the hospital have started the process of converting their existing computer systems, or in some cases paper medical records, to an integrated electronic health records (EHR) system.

The new Meditech system is being installed in phases, beginning with financial and other management functions at the hospital. In August 2011, many of the hospital's clinical systems will be converted. In early 2012, the physician practices will switch over, completing the transition.

Once the new system is in place, emergency department personnel won't have to spend precious time looking for a patient's chart, says Marilyn Olejnik, Porter's chief financial officer. There will be fewer phone calls needed to primary care physician offices to gather information, and emergency department physicians will know immediately what medications their patients are on.

"It does really improve the patient care when they come in the emergency department," she says.

"Having information from primary care physicians in front of them means the emergency department physician will spend more time with patients," and less time on the

phone trying to gather information, says Denis Mailloux, Porter's information technology director.

Eventually patients will be able to use a web-based portal to view their own information, he adds.

At the physician offices, patient registration will be easier, says Christine Mulholland, formerly the office manager at Bristol Internal Medicine and currently

Porter's LSS software implementation specialist. Patients won't have to present their insurance information at each office they visit, she says. Nor will they have to fill out a medical history at each new location. That and other information will be shared across practices and with the hospital.

"If we were to send them to the emergency room, the emergency room would have a list of their medications, a list of their problems, their immunization status," she says.

The latter is important because physician practices now receive many telephone inquiries from hospital personnel asking when a patient last had a tetanus shot or a flu vaccination.

Middlebury area physicians do provide coverage for each other on nights and weekends, Mulholland points out. The integrated EHR system will enable physicians to access patient information immediately after hours, even if

the patient has not been seen in the practice before.

"That's going to be huge, patients will get better care after hours," she says.

While the benefits of sharing patient information are many, Olejnik says patients will have control over whether their information is accessible.

"The patient's privacy is our utmost concern. If a patient chooses not to share their record, they have that right and that restriction will be put on that record," she explains.

Porter Medical Center and its physician practices are being assisted in the transition by Vermont Information Technology Leaders Inc. (VITL), a nonprofit organization located in Montpelier that helps Vermont health care providers with health information technology. VITL receives funding from both the state and federal governments to carry out its mission.

Priscilla Phelps, one of VITL's implementation specialists, is spending two to three days a week working with Porter's team on the project.

"There is a constant flow of emails and questions," she says. VITL has been able to provide the Porter team with guidance about how to proceed, and what potential pitfalls to avoid.

For example, VITL alerted Porter's

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# Author to discuss 'Life in a Jar' Station

**SALISBURY** — Jack Mayer, author of "Life in a Jar: The Irena Sendler Story," will speak at the Salisbury Public Library on Thursday, March 24, at 7 p.m. "Life in a Jar" is the story of Irena Sendler, a social worker who rescued over 2,500 children from the Warsaw ghetto in Poland during World War II.

Sendler had to convince their parents to let them go, then smuggle them out of the ghetto and find

them safe homes. She buried little pieces of paper with each child's real name, parents' names, and adoptive parents' names beneath an apple tree so that their identities would not be forgotten. Sendler's own name was virtually forgotten until three students from a rural high school in Kansas uncovered her story and dramatized it for a history project.

The book is the story of Sendler's rescue work as well as the story of

the lives of the three students who rediscovered her and brought her legacy to life. Ultimately, it is the inspiring story of how one person can change the world.

Jack Mayer is a writer and pediatrician who lives and works in Middlebury. He will discuss his research and writing process in the living room at library. Refreshments will be served. This event is free and open to the public.

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business."

The Middlebury DRB on Monday was also scheduled to review proposals for:

- Desabrais Laundry to rent a portion of the former Durasol Systems Inc. headquarters at 1232 Exchange St. Company owners Steve and Lucy Noble are proposing to locate administrative offices and a public/commercial laundry service in one of the 1232 Exchange St. buildings, and drop-off and pick-up for dry cleaning service in another structure at the site. The company would also clean rugs on premises and on location, according to a project narrative. Plans do not call for any dry cleaning at the site.

Desabrais Laundry operated locally at 55 Middle Road until last October, when the property owners announced plans to sell the building. The Nobles

established a temporary pickup spot at 18 Creek Road for laundry pickup while they searched for a new headquarters for Desabrais. They believe they have found such a spot at 1232 Exchange St.

The Nobles will have to get DRB permission to change the use of 1232 Exchange St. from light industry to retail laundry service. The DRB will have to determine, among other things, whether another retail use is compatible for an industrial park area.

- Improvements, including lighting, for Middlebury College's Kohn Field, a 240-foot-by-360 foot, all-weather surface. The field is used primarily by the college field hockey team, women's lacrosse squad and the men's lacrosse team.

Reporter John Flowers is at [johnf@addisonindependent.com](mailto:johnf@addisonindependent.com).

## Porter

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team to the importance of designing databases so that information sharing between the hospital and the physician practices will be easier. As a result, the team changed some of its earlier approaches so that now the system will be more tightly integrated.

Other assistance being provided by VITL includes mapping out workflow processes and determining where interactions between the hospital and practices take place, developing detailed training plans, and documenting computer hardware requirements.

Another VITL team is working with Porter's staff on building the computer interfaces that will be used to transmit information between various sites. VITL is helping Porter's staff with achieving the criteria for a federal incentive program that will help pay for the new EHR system. This includes assessing potential risks and developing plans to mitigate them.

VITL's help has been valuable, says Mulholland, because its staff members "have the big picture. They've been through this before, they understand the process."

The task of switching to a new medical records computer system can be very overwhelming, she adds, but VITL has provided a roadmap and helps keep everyone on track.

Not every physician practice in the Middlebury area is hospital-owned. For example, Middlebury Family Health and Rainbow Pediatrics are independent practices in the process of implementing their own EHR systems, which are from different vendors than the hospital's system. VITL is working with those practices and others to help them implement their EHRs and communicate electronically with Porter and its practices. This is being done through the Vermont Health Information Exchange, a secure network for Vermont health care providers operated by VITL.

Besides linking the Porter organization to other Middlebury area health care providers, the Vermont Health Information Exchange will be used to send information to other

parts of the state, such as when a primary care physician refers a patient to a specialist, or a Porter patient is transferred to Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington. The ability to transmit information electronically will save time and cut down on follow-up phone calls, Mulholland points out.

While the work to connect Porter and Middlebury-area physician practices has been generally going smoothly, a few bumps along the way are normal for a project this big and complex, says Mulholland.

"VITL prepared us for that," she says. "They said, 'You are going to have good days and you're going to have bad

days.' It's good to have that support from VITL."

*Editor's note: This story is provided by Ron Hallman of Porter Medical Center.*

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—Christine Mulholland

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