

HEALTH MATTERS

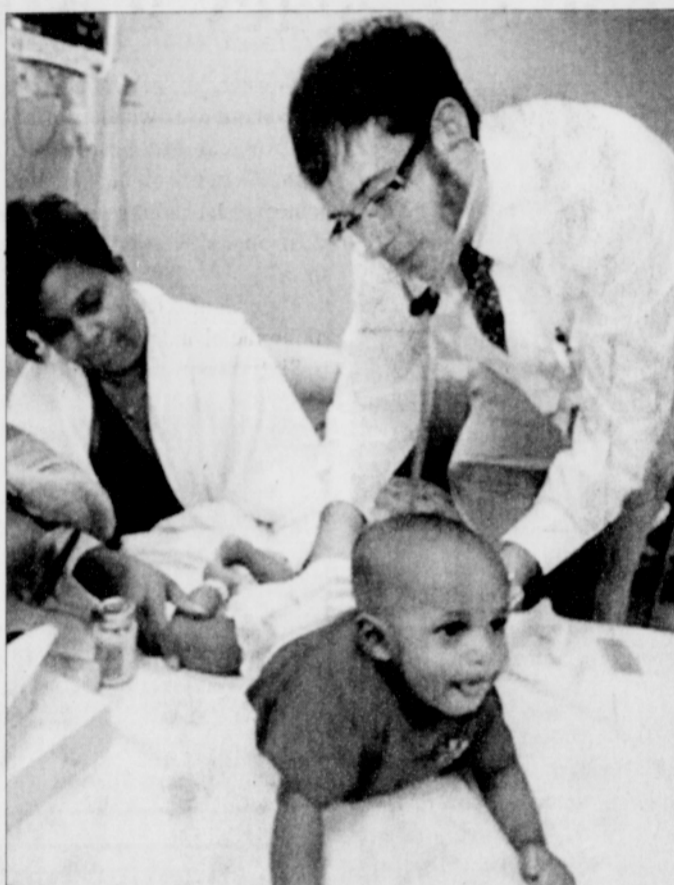
Digital Records Improve Health Care

(AP) -- Baby Riley Matthews wheezed noisily on the exam table. "He's belly-breathing," the emergency-room doctor said worriedly — Riley's little abdomen was markedly rising and falling with each breath, a sign of respiratory distress.

In most emergency rooms, the doctor would grill Mom: Has he ever been X-rayed? Do you remember what it showed? But in the new all-digital Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, doctors just clicked on a COW — a "computer on wheels" that rolls to each patient's side. Up popped every test and X-ray the 6-month-old has ever had.

This is the eerily paperless hospital of the future, what the "electronic medical record" that President Barack Obama insists will transform what health care looks like.

No chart full of doctors' scribbles hanging on the bed. No hauling around envelopes full of X-rays. No discharge with a prescription slip. Even the classic ER patient list has changed from the white-board of TV-drama fame to a giant



Dr. Max Rohrbaugh examines 6-month-old Riley Matthews as his mother watches at Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh. It can take days for the results of diagnostic tests to wind up in a hospital's paper chart, while only hours later, Riley's test results and long note from a lung specialist popped up in his digital chart. (AP photo)

computer screen.

By the best count, only 1.5 percent of the nation's roughly 6,000 hospitals use a comprehensive electronic record.

Even that statistic belies how hard it will be for health care to jettison its 19th-century filing system by 2014, the federal government's goal — despite the \$19 billion that the economic stimulus package is providing to help doctors start.

It took Children's seven hard years and more than \$10 million to evolve a system that lets its doctors check on patients with a few mouse clicks from anywhere and use speedily up-to-date records in directing their care.

Studies show electronic medical records can greatly improve the quality of patient care and reduce errors. But hospitals won't necessarily recoup their investment, because a patient who goes home sooner means lost revenue.

So Congress added a stick to the carrot of the stimulus money: Health providers that aren't digital enough by 2015 will start losing Medicare dol-

lars.

Children's moved from a decades-old building to a new hospital in May, a final step in its digital journey. One wing is inpatient, the other houses offices for specialists' outpatient care, all linked by the "eRecord."

Some 4,000 computers line the halls. Nurses swipe patients' wristbands with bar-code scanners to see when it's time for

medication, and then match the bar-coded dose to the prescription.

In the intensive care unit, computer "dashboards" automatically graph patients' vital signs and other readings from monitors and lab tests — letting nurses spot at a glance a drop or spike that signals a patient about to get in trouble, instead of rifling pages of a paper chart to tell.

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Study: Contraceptives Less Effective on Obese

A new study published in the journal Contraception has found that oral contraceptives may be less effective at preventing pregnancy in obese women.

The study suggested that it takes twice as long for contraceptives to reach the effective blood concentration in obese women, which may

leave them open to becoming pregnant.

About 30 percent of women in the U.S. are obese. For Oregon, that number is about 23 percent.

The study suggested that the basic problem was that oral contraceptives were tested on people with a healthier body weight, which

has left a blind spot for doctors who may not be aware of how the drug affects very overweight people. In fact, some doctors may prescribe a lower dosage for obese patients, fearing that a higher dose will put them at greater risk of developing blood clots that can lead to stroke or heart attack.

However, the study noted that it didn't have enough data to make a recommendation for how physicians might change their clinical practice for the use of oral contraceptives who are obese.

Obese women who use oral contraceptives should consult with their doctor, recommended the study.

Finding your 'Sole Mate' this Summer

Just because we've entered the hottest days of the summer doesn't mean you should hide in an air-conditioned room while your body steadily accumulates fat. You can get some sun and stay healthy by

taking morning or late evening walks.

The American Heart Association has released a summer walking guide, which can be found at startpdx.org. It includes stretching techniques,

tips on what to wear, when and where to walk, and what to eat before and after walking.

It's best to establish a regular time that you can stick to all summer long, preferably a time other than afternoon

when the sun is hottest.

The American Heart Association recommends walking at least 30 minutes a day. It combats obesity, which can cause a host of other problems.

Daily Activity for Health

Providence health experts are reminding folks that adding just a little activity to your day can make a big difference in your fitness level.

Climbing stairs, weeding the garden, raking leaves, vacuuming, doing dishes and mowing

the lawn can all help add up to a more active lifestyle.

In addition to household chores, try including activities that are more recreational and involve your kids as well.

Tossing a ball around, playing catch with beanbags or

working on your Frisbee flings can all provide great motivation for adding fun activity.

You can also try taking a 10-minute walk around the block as a family. Your fitness level will increase — and so will your family fun.

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HEALTHWATCH

Changing From the Inside Out -- Get to the root of your weight problem by identifying thoughts and feelings that affect your eating and activity patterns. In a group setting, you'll learn new skills to overcome emotional eating patterns. The class, offered by Providence, lasts 10 weeks and begins Sept. 8. Fee \$195. Call 503-216-5641 for more information.

Confident Cycling for Commuters -- Learn to commute on a bike with more confidence in this free presentation.

Mastering Weight Management -- An 8-week program beginning Aug. 13 that integrates a nondieting approach to healthy living and eating. Learn to take control of your food choices and activities and begin to feel better. Registration is required. Call 503-286-6816. Fee is \$120 for Kaiser members and \$150 for nonmembers.

Helping Kids Get Healthy and Fit -- Providence is accepting registration for its fall 2009 Healthy n' Fit class, a pediatric weight management program targeting children 8 to 15 years old. The 10-week program is led by a certified dietitian and exercise specialist. Fee \$250. To register, call 503-215-2233.

Mammography Screening -- Early detection is a key factor in the prevention of breast cancer. Call 503-251-6137 to schedule your high-tech, soft-touch mammogram.

Bereavement Support Groups -- Free, safe confidential group meetings for those who

have experienced the death of a loved one offered on various nights and locations. For information and registration, call 503-215-4622.

Parenting Classes -- Newborns don't come with instruction manuals but parents and parents-to-be can learn about a variety of topics from pain and childbirth to breastfeeding to infant CPR and much more. For a schedule of events, call 503-574-6595 or visit: providence.org/classes.

Powerful Tools For Caregivers -- 6-week educational series designed to help family caregivers take care of themselves while caring for relatives or friends with chronic illness. Class size is limited, and registration is required. Call 503-413-8018.

Is it ADHD? -- Kaiser Permanent offers a medical evaluation process that can help determine if your child's behavior problems are due to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The Aug. 5 forum includes resources and support. Registration is required by calling 503-286-6816. Fee is \$20 for Kaiser couples and \$25 for nonmember couples.

Better Breathers -- An asthma educational support group meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month from 1:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. at Adventist Medical Center. For information, call 503-251-6830.

Stroke Alert Screening -- Check your carotid arteries with a painless ultrasound to assess your risk. Fee \$40. To schedule a screening, call 503-251-6137.

Senior Aerobics -- A low-impact workout geared specifically toward seniors. Call 503-449-0783 for current schedule.

Osteoporosis Screening -- An ultrasound bone density screening with personalized education; fee \$30. To schedule an appointment, call 503-261-6611.

Cardiac-Rehab Exercises -- A medically supervised exercise program for people dealing with heart conditions. For information, call 503-251-6260.

Red Cross Continuing Education -- The Oregon Trail Chapter Red Cross now offers credits to help professionals maintain licensing or certification. For a cumulative list, visit pdxinfo.net.

Cancer Resource Center -- Providence St. Vincent Medical Center and the American Red Cross have joined forces to create the first in-hospital resource center providing books, printed material, computer access and more for individuals and families dealing with cancer. The center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Chronic Pain Support Group -- Meets the first Wednesday at 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the third Wednesday of each month, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call 503-256-4000.

Maternity Water Workout -- Helping new moms regain muscle tone, strength, and flexibility, all in the support and freedom of the water. Call 503-256-4000 for more information.

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