

Grandview goes digital

By: [Ben Benton](#) Chattanooga Times Free Press

JASPER, Tenn. -- The last thing someone with an emergency wants to see is an ambulance crew member holding a stack of forms instead of medical equipment and medicine.

That's one of the reasons Grandview Medical Center's emergency medical service has gone paperless, said Jeff Roberts, ambulance director at the hospital in Marion County.

Mr. Roberts and 39 crew members are crowing about six new Panasonic Toughbook laptops that allow them to collect patient information in the field and transfer it to the hospital from wireless Internet hot spots around the county, officials said.

"It helps us reduce paperwork, help us reduce all the trees we've been killing over the years (and) it also maximizes our efficiency in getting patient care reports done, getting them into the office and then getting them to billers," said Mr. Roberts.

The digital system's more thorough data control started streamlining record keeping as soon as it was launched June 1, Mr. Roberts said.

Paducah, Ky.-based Medical Accounts Receivable System, the hospital's accounting firm, provided the laptops at no charge, he said.

Personnel armed with the new laptops log in information at the scene by tapping a few buttons to document the injury or illness in real time, he said. Then they stop at a Wi-Fi hot spot where the information uploads to a server that is available to the hospital.

Hot spots include the hospital, ambulance stations in Kimball and Whitwell, most of South Pittsburg and several restaurants and other businesses, officials said.

The system also instantly can relay medical protocols, clinical operating guidelines and medication information to the person with the laptop, he said.

Vicki Messer, a paramedic with 22 years of experience, called the technology "wonderful."

"In my day-to-day duties, it cut them about in half," Ms. Messer said.

The system rids ambulance staff of volumes of forms, she said.

"The cool part is you don't have to do the paperwork anymore," said Gwen Westmoreland, an EMT with Grandview for the last two years. "Since I'm new at this, I had just gotten used to the paperwork."

Learning the digital system was no more difficult than learning the hard-copy method, she said.

The computer is easier to navigate than a stack of papers and nothing gets lost at the scene, the two women said.

Ms. Messer said the laptops have shortcuts so the user can pop in necessary information, then come back to add details later. With them, she doesn't have to worry about accidentally dropping a piece of paper or a form that has the patient's private information on it, she said.

"We're excited to be able to change and adapt to more efficient methods of patient care, whether it be in the field on an EMS call or here within the hospital," Grandview CEO Bruce Baldwin said.

The new laptops mark the beginning of an overall "assessment of technology" at Grandview, Mr. Baldwin said.

Online: Click the link below to watch Grandview's Jeff Roberts demonstrate new laptops in ambulances. Hear Vicki Messer and Gwen Westmoreland talk about using the laptops.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2009/jul/21/grandview-goes-digital/>