

Hospital offers online update on patients

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Special correspondent

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Lying alone in a hospital bed can be a trying and anxious experience, but friends and loved ones can keep in touch with patients at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood by accessing a secure "care page."

The online service, offered for about two years, enables patients to keep family and friends up-to-date with current messages about their condition and post photos, and allows loved ones to leave messages for the patient and their family.

"It's a very simple three- or four-step process to access the care pages," said Nick Masi, the hospital's director of family-centered care. "It's really been a wonderful asset, and it helps cut down all the telephone calls from loved ones wishing to learn about the patient's condition. And grandparents from around the world log on and see how their little Johnny is doing."

Some patients have maintained their care pages for months, even years in the case of cancer patients in remission who know they will return for follow-up care.

About 35 pages are currently set up for patients. One patient's care page has attracted almost 4,000 "hits," or visits, Masi said.

The program is part of a wider effort to enlist loved ones in the healing.

"A support system is incredibly helpful to the healing process," Masi said. "Everyone wants to be more involved, and the care pages are a meaningful way for family members and friends to be involved with the recovery process."

Cindi Grazioso of Boynton Beach learned about the pages when her neighbor's infant son was diagnosed with a rare form of brain cancer. His parents set up the page to keep their far-flung network of friends and family aware of his condition.

Grazioso said the boy's mother told her she wanted a way to keep loved ones informed about her son's condition without being bombarded with telephone calls.

"It's better than having to repeat the same thing over and over," she said. "You wanted to help, but you don't want to intrude. She wanted to spend her time with her son and daughter, and every night she'd make time to do her update for the page."

Though the baby died several weeks ago, his parents are maintaining the page as a tribute.

"It's a great idea, and I think it helped the parents to see that they were not alone and that they had the support they needed and still do," Grazioso said.

The hospital pays the computer firm TLContact about \$18,000 a year to provide the service and update the pages. The hospital also provides computer kiosks at various locations to enable family members to log on.

Each care page also contains contact information and the hospital's visiting hours. Masi said users must be invited

by family members and receive a password before they can access an individual page.

"The biggest issue we had was how we could protect the patient's right to privacy if we offered this service," he said. "You must be issued a restricted password, which you can only get if you are invited by the family."

The company also scans the various pages daily and shuts down the page if it spots any inappropriate activity, he said.

In addition, discharged patients can have their care pages' information and photos copied onto a computer disc.

"They can download it onto a CD for you, and you can have a video scrapbook of your hospital stay," Masi said.

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