Sentara TIGR system puts education at patient’s fingertips

Sentara Healthcare now offers its patients and their families an opportunity to become an interactive part of their care through an in-hospital system designed to help them learn about their condition.

Through its telephone initiated guided response, or TIGR, system, Sentara aims to help patients better understand their conditions.

Audrey Douglas-Cooke, director for cardiovascular and critical care services at Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital, said the health care group started rolling out this program about two years ago, but it has hit its stride this year as it is now used in all of the Sentara hospitals in Hampton Roads.

“We embarked on this because we want to keep our patients informed, keep them involved and make them active participants in their care,” she said.

The TIGR system enables patients to use the telephone and television in their hospital room to access a library of educational videos on several different health topics.

Sentara works with TeleHealth Services, a company that provides healthcare-grade televisions and interactive patient education solutions, to keep TIGR running.

The two groups recently came to an agreement to have TeleHealth provide new technologies, such as new televisions, to support the TIGR system.

With TIGR, patients can watch videos about everything from cardiovascular diseases to healthy living.

The videos offer simplified explanations along with photos, need-to-know facts and real-life examples.

“The videos are very informational with lots of pictures of people talking about the diseases,” Douglas-Cooke said. “If you make it too ‘classroomy,’ I think it turns the patients off.”

She said the system has been well-received by patients, especially during a time when most people are technologically savvy.

“Patients love it,” Douglas-Cooke said. “Coming into the hospital setting, they have the technological ability to access this knowledge.”

She said the system is also a big help to the people providing the care.

Nurses and doctors have the ability now to “prescribe” videos for the patients to watch in order to inform them on certain things.

For example, a nurse might prescribe a patient who has been diagnosed with diabetes to watch a video on diabetes as well as one on healthy eating.

And nurses can keep track of the videos their patients are watching and find out about things they are hoping to learn more about.
When a patient has watched a video, the nurse is able to go into their rooms and clear up anything they don’t understand.

Douglas-Cooke said from the information Sentara has gathered, a variety of demographics are using the TIGR system.

“Across the board, it’s extremely even among all groups,” she said.

However, there does seem to be certain conditions that prompt more use of TIGR, including videos on cardiac condition, orthopedics, diet and diabetes.

Douglas-Cooke said the trends depend on what conditions are prominent in the community.

For example, she said Sentara is seeing more heart disease patients because people are living longer and more young people are having heart trouble related to obesity. As a result, more people are looking to access information on heart diseases.

As for the next step for TIGR, Douglas-Cooke said Sentara is working with TeleHealth to develop a way to send messages about the videos patients watch digitally to their electronic patient documents.

“We want information to be put in electronically to the system in real time as it occurs,” she said.

She added the more automated the system is, the more time nurses can spend at the bed side instead of organizing patient folders.

She said the automatic addition of the videos to the documents is something several nurses suggested, and Sentara and TeleHealth are hoping to make it happen soon.