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Lafayette Start-Up Wants to End Wrong-Site Surgery

By Sophie Braccini



Dr. Arne Brock-Utne (center) and his team. Photo Sophie Braccini

Wrong-site surgery, when a surgeon operates on the wrong side of the patient's body, is a nightmare that is more than anecdotal. According to the Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare, although reporting of wrong-site surgery is not mandatory in most states some estimates put the national incidence rate as high as 40 per week. A young doctor and entrepreneur in Lafayette has set out to change that by creating a system called Issio Solutions that prevents wrong site surgery. The system is being implemented at the Aspen Surgery Center in Walnut Creek where, according to Issio Solutions, Inc., the quality of operations has skyrocketed.

"Issio has caught approximately one incorrectly scheduled surgery per week," says Issio's Erin Smrz. "Zero incidents at the surgery center in the four months that Aspen has been using the application designed by Dr. Arne Brock-Utne-they are the safest clinic in America."

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons says that wrong-site surgery is a devastating problem that affects both the patient and surgeon, and results from poor preoperative planning, lack of institutional controls, failure of the surgeon to exercise due care, or a simple mistake in

communication between the patient and the surgeon.

"Communication is key to eliminating the problem," says Brock-Utne. "In hospitals today doctors are working under great stress with a large volume of patients. And surgery is a team effort, everyone needs to be on the same page at the same time, manipulating a large amount of information that most of the time is in one paper file that everyone needs to be reading at the same time."

Brock-Utne says that the problem is that hospital and surgical centers have made great efforts to computerize the business side of hospitals, but not the clinical side. His solution is a cloud-based system that is accessed by all the different stakeholders in an operation, including the patient, and updated in real time as the patient moves through the system from admission to the operating table. As the information is updated, those who need it can access and control it.

"When they arrive at the clinic, patients answer a series of questions regarding the procedure they are having that day," explains Brock-Utne. "They are offered different choices, and if they do not see the operation they are scheduled to have, they can indicate so." The response triggers an alert, and that is how the first mistake was caught at Aspen—a patient had been scheduled for the wrong surgery.

At each step that precedes the surgery, staff inputs what is done and at what time. "This is also a way to improve infections in hospitals," says Brock-Utne. Patients must receive a dose of an antibiotic one hour before an operation. But sometimes the surgeon is late and starts after the window of efficiency of the product. With Issio in place, monitors in the operating room will automatically signal the problem. "We also added systems to make sure that no step is skipped during the pre-op preparations."

Since September of last year Aspen Surgery Center has agreed to be the beta site for Issio. Staff first worked double-charting until Feb. 4 when they started relying only on Issio. Now Brock-Utne's team has been demonstrating the application to ambulatory surgical centers. For a clinic, the cost is both hardware to equip the facility with the flat screen televisions, and mobile devices for personnel and patients to input information; and Issio charges the clinic a fee per patient. The return on investment comes from eliminating paperwork and all the costs associated with errors.

So far Brock-Utne has financed the company he started in November of 2011 with the support of family and friends. He was helped along the way by a next door neighbor who is a software engineer; another one is in finance; and his wife, who is maintaining her practice as a pediatrician. He has already hired 11 people and one intern and put his anesthesiology career on hold with no regret—he feels this business is his life's calling.

For more information, visit www.issio.com.

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