

Patients who take a variety of medications benefit from program at Ocean Medical Center

By Michael Amsel • STAFF WRITER • March 4, 2008

As people age, and their health begins to deteriorate, they are often prescribed various medications by doctors. This is especially true for senior citizens, who sometimes have to take so many medications that they suffer adverse drug reactions or have trouble monitoring their progress.

Ocean Medical Center in Brick, part of Meridian Health, has started a Pharmacology Institute to deal with these problems and help those who are especially susceptible to lapses in treatment.

Robert J. Schenk Jr., a clinical pharmacist specialist at Ocean Medical, said that more than 100 people are using the service now, including many who suffer from diabetes.

"Many of the people I see are in their 70s and 80s and they are seeing three or four different doctors," Schenk said. "Some of them don't even have a primary care physician. They take a lot of medications, which are very difficult to keep track of. I have done a survey on this and, on average, each senior takes 10 prescriptions and four supplements (vitamins, herbs, etc.) a day."

John Lloyd, president and CEO of Meridian Health, said the hospital is developing a comprehensive electronic health record system that will "take it to the next level."

"When the patients are in the hospital, we work with their families and physicians to get all the information about their medications and past health problems," Lloyd explained. "Outside, there is no electronic vehicle to manage this. What we are doing now is working with pharmaceutical companies, which have compiled a database on prescriptions for over a decade, and hopefully this will become more accessible to us. Our goal is to eventually reconcile all the pieces of information into a database so we can cover pre-hospital, in-hospital and post-hospital care for our patients."

Gary Horan of Brick, who underwent a triple bypass surgery in June 2007, is a diabetic and has a low-thyroid condition. He takes nine different medications daily. Horan met Schenk while going through his cardiac rehabilitation at Ocean Medical, and really likes the personalized blood glucose monitoring system, a feature of the Pharmacology Institute.



Robert J. Schenk Jr., a clinical pharmacist specialist at Meridian Pharmacology Institute at Ocean Medical Center in Brick with monitor system that allows a person to upload their blood glucose numbers to their pharmacist as part of a new pharmacy watchdog program for senior citizens.

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PETER ACKERMAN

"At home, I plug in a box the hospital provided to my computer and it tracks my blood glucose tests," said Horan, 65. "I then print out the data and transmit it right to the hospital. It's a big advantage for the doctor. I can provide him a month, six months or a year's worth of data. They got my results today at 11:48 a.m., right before I was scheduled for an appointment."

Schenk said there is a "very high concentration" of seniors in Ocean and Monmouth counties and he will often go to active adult communities to lecture them about the program, along with holding seminars at the hospital.

"When I do the seminar, I have them fill out their list of medications and give me as much information as possible," Schenk explained. "In conjunction with that, they fill out a medication therapy screening questionnaire and I collect them and do a review. Through examination of the data, I find out if someone needs to come in and have a consultation."