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## Medical records handier than ever

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When Paula Wallace checked in at Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy last week, she gave the registrar her name, birthdate, address and Social Security number.

Then she offered one more piece of identification: Her palm.

When Wallace returns to a Carolinas HealthCare System hospital or doctor, she won't have to recite all that private information again.

She'll simply place her right palm on a scanner that "reads" the veins inside her palm. The hospital system's computerized database, with 3 million patient names, will quickly pull up her medical records.

Wallace, who's had her Social Security number stolen in the past, likes the idea of making patient ID systems more secure.

Mercy, CMC-University and CMC-Pineville are among the first hospitals in the country to use the device, called Palm Secure, to identify and register patients.

It will be in all Carolinas HealthCare System hospitals by the end of the year. CHS-owned doctors' offices and outpatient centers will have it by the end of 2008, for a total cost of \$1 million, said Jim Burke, director of information services for CHS.

Hospital officials considered several ideas, including fingerprinting, to make patient registration quicker, more secure and accurate. But a reading of palm veins is "100 times more unique than a fingerprint," Burke said.

Palm Secure, made by Fujitsu, uses infrared light waves to scan a person's unique vein pattern -- counting veins and noting their proximity to one another. The device then produces a number that corresponds to the scan and is stored in the database.

In Japan, palm vein scanners are used to provide security at automated teller machines, Burke said. Fujitsu officials told CHS officials they know of no other hospital using it for patient registration.

CHS employees designed the 6-pound white brick that houses each scanner so it would be durable enough to withstand being touched by many patients every day. Each brick has two protruding stainless steel rods that fit on both sides of the middle finger to make sure the hand is in the right position.

Once patients are scanned, subsequent registration will be faster as well as more private, said Kathy Shivers, registration manager at Mercy.

"All we need is name and date of birth."

Even patients who come to the hospital unconscious can be registered if they've been scanned previously, said Dr. Roger Ray, CHS chief medical officer.

"You always have your palm with you."