

Scanner's future looks bright

Palm identification used by Carolinas HealthCare saves time at appointments and during hospital stays.

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Posted: Monday, Aug. 10, 2009

Since implementing a palm-scanning patient identification system in its facilities two years ago, Carolinas HealthCare System has seen few technology problems, and patients generally appreciate the secure system, officials said.



Detail of patient Gina Qasim of Matthews using the palm scanner at Charlotte Ob/Gyn Arboretum. All Charlotte-area CMC hospitals and offices now have the palm scanner system to register patients. DIEDRA LAIRD-dlaird@charlotteobserver.com

PalmSecure, a hand scanner that reads people's unique vein patterns and translates them into numeric identification codes, now sits on registration counters at all CHS-owned hospitals, physicians' offices and care centers in the Charlotte area and some throughout the Carolinas. It premiered at CMC-Mercy, CMC-University and CMC-Pineville hospitals in 2007.

CHS implemented the palm scanner as a way to nonintrusively and accurately identify patients for appointments and hospital admission. The first time they register, patients give their personal information and have their palm scanned. After that, they can scan their hands at any CHS-owned office and the computer can pull up their information quickly.



Detail of palm scanner at Charlotte Ob/Gyn Arboretum. All Charlotte-area CMC hospitals and offices now have the palm scanner system to register patients. DIEDRA LAIRD-dlaird@charlotteobserver.com

“It eliminates the opportunity for mis-selecting patients that have similar names,” said Kevin McNeice, vice president for information services. “It also cuts down on the amount of information that has to be verbally communicated in an office setting.”

McNeice said over 500,000 patients were in the optional system as of the end of last month. ValleyCare Health System in California and Baycare Health System in Florida also use versions of PalmSecure.

The system is ideal, McNeice said, for when a patient is sent to another CHS office. Jessica Morris of south Charlotte isn't a regular patient at Charlotte Obstetrics and Gynecology-Arboretum, but when she went for her appointment last week, she scanned her palm and the registrar quickly had all her information. She also uses the scanner at her primary physician's office in Southpark.

“It was very convenient,” the mom-to-be said. “It's neat to see it networked between offices.”



Amy Wlodyka scans her hand at the counter with her baby Ryan Wlodyka as she enters for her appointment at Charlotte Obstetrics and Gynecology - Arboretum.

Mary Ervin of Rock Hill said she “was not too thrilled” when the receptionist at CHS-affiliate Palmetto Pediatrics asked her daughter to scan her hand last year. She said she wasn't given an option to use the system and is concerned about identity theft.

“I'm in South Carolina – a whole state away from them (CHS),” she said.

Since implementing the scanner, physicians have also been able to successfully identify emergency room patients who may have arrived unconscious or disoriented.

“With (an identification) card, we still would've been making an assumption,” said Dr. Roger Ray, executive vice president to the chief medical officer.