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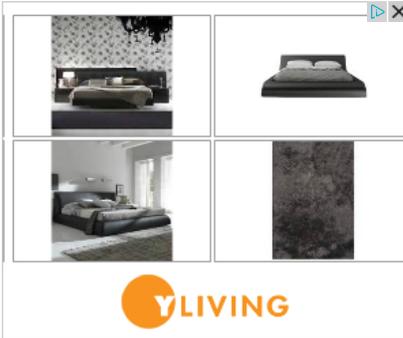
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South Florida hospitals using cutting-edge innovations

November 15, 2013 | By Nicole Brochu, Staff writer

A computerized program that allows orthopedic surgeons to practice their accuracy in 3-D. A heart stent that can be absorbed by the body, reducing scarring. A remote monitor, the size of an answering machine, that checks to see how well a pacemaker is keeping the heart in rhythm, saving valuable treatment time.



Charge nurse Lisa Joswick demonstrates a Medtronic Carelink Express monitor... (Amy Beth Bennett, Sun Sentinel)

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These and other cutting-edge innovations are debuting at hospitals around South Florida, home to a bustling medical marketplace that is attracting some of the latest advancements in health care.

Why? Because we are "savvy, sophisticated" health care consumers, as one hospital executive put it, and the competition for our loyalty is stiff.

"Look at the number of hospitals in South Florida compared to normal places. We have so many hospitals here, it's ridiculous, and we're all fighting for the same patient base," said Dr. Charles Posternack, chief medical officer at Boca Raton Regional Hospital.

Many patients here have moved from the Northeast, home to some of the nation's most advanced hospitals and research centers, he said, and they "know the difference between good, very good and excellent." The most effective way to appeal to such consumers, Posternack said, is to offer the best medical care around.

Enter state-of-the-art technologies like the 3-D Match Point System. Dr. Jonathan Levy, chief of orthopedics at Fort Lauderdale's Holy Cross Hospital, last month performed the nation's first shoulder replacement surgery using the computerized program, which maps out and customizes the procedure for each patient.

By uploading a CT scan of the patient's shoulder, the system provides a 3-D model of the socket "with a guide that can replicate exactly how you want to do the surgery," Levy said. This allows the surgeon to practice the accuracy of how the replacement parts will be inserted.

"It is very cool," said Levy, who was chosen as the first U.S. doctor to use the system because he led the validation study that helped the device earn clearance from the Food and Drug Administration. "This is the first step to the future of how we're going to do shoulder replacement surgery."

These new technologies "bring the opportunity to allow patients to get literally the best care in the country at a local institution," Levy said. "They don't have to go to Boston or Chicago to get that kind of care. It's available right here with local surgeons that are just as cutting-edge as anyone in the country, if not more."

Some of those doctors don't just use the latest equipment, they work to make it better.

Boca Raton Regional Hospital became the first Florida hospital to use the Medtronic Carelink Express

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Boca Raton Regional last month became the first Florida hospital to use the Medtronic CareLink Express monitor, which saves hours of potential delays in treating patients by allowing doctors to check pacemakers or other implanted cardiac devices on the spot, hospital officials say.

Traditionally, implanted-device patients coming into the ER must first have their devices checked to make sure they're working properly before any procedures can be performed. That can mean a delay of 30 minutes to an hour in true emergencies, or several hours for non-emergencies, while hospital staff wait for a company field representative to arrive and perform the check, said Dr. E. Martin Kloosterman, Boca Regional's chief of cardiology.

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With the CareLink Express remote monitor, doctors can run the checks themselves, with results sent by fax and email within 15 minutes.

But the device has its limitations — it only works on Medtronic devices. So Kloosterman has developed the prototype for what he says could be the next-generation solution, compatible on machines manufactured by the top three implantable device companies, with results ready in real-time on a smartphone.

He used the machine on 41 patients as part of a study, with results published in July in the Journal of Innovations in Cardiac Rhythm Management.

Such innovations typically come at no additional cost to the patient, Kloosterman said, because "it's to the hospital's benefit in how expeditiously a patient can be moved" and the quality of care it can provide.

Hospitals that establish themselves as leaders in their field become the go-to locations to try out the latest technology, said Dr. Richard Perryman, medical director at Memorial Cardiac & Vascular Institute in Hollywood. Because of its reputation for multi-specialty collaboration, the institute was chosen as one of a few U.S. sites to host a study on a state-of-the-art stent that can be absorbed by the body, he said.

"Vendors are looking to put their products in places that will use it the best," Perryman said. "Unless you're in the technological pipeline, you're really not providing optimum care."

In fact, many physicians expect nothing less than the latest technology, especially the newest generation of doctors, who often train on the most cutting-edge equipment.

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