

AMH Hospitalists Ease Burden for Primary Care Physicians

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When you think of a hospital, you think of doctors. However, the nature of medicine today leaves some primary care physicians with precious little time to care for their hospitalized patients.

That's where a hospitalist comes into play. Hospitalists are, simply, hospital-based internal medicine physicians who provide for the care of hospitalized patients in the place of a patient's primary care physician.

At Alton Memorial Hospital, the staff of hospitalists includes Dr. Vikram Patney (medical director), Dr. Stanley Sidwell, Dr. Muhammad Ali, Dr. Fardina Malik, Dr. Pallavi Aneja, Dr. Narine Sargsyan and Dr. Amit Gupta.

"Some primary care physicians choose to see their patients when they are admitted to Alton Memorial," says Tammy Bugger RN, manager of Alton Memorial Hospitalist Services. "But for those who do not round at the hospital, we have a great staff of doctors here who are able to manage the care during a patient's stay."

Hospitalist Services strives to maintain continuity of care. The average hospital stay for a patient is three to five days.

"We try to assign the same physician to the patient daily," Bugger says. "If a change is required, that physician will give a sign out to the new physician coming on. So when, or if, you have to see a different physician, they will come in with knowledge regarding your condition."

"Hospitalists are a big advantage with their availability on the floors for patients, their families and the nurses," says Dr. Patney. "The improved coordination with specialists is another advantage."

The term "hospitalist" was first introduced in 1996 and Bugger said it's a growing trend in hospitals all around the United States.

"Primary care physicians can find themselves working very long days if they are holding their regular office hours, doing patient callbacks and also seeing patients in the hospital," Bugger says. "Some still do that, but for those who do not follow their patients at the hospital, that is what we are here for."

Bugger also said that many patients could be admitted to Alton Memorial without a primary care physician. This leaves them as obvious candidates to be treated by a hospitalist, and then Bugger says she works to set them up with a primary care physician upon discharge.