

TheraDoc targets infection detection, control

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GREAT NECK, NY – Nothing can cause more havoc in a hospital than an infection. If left unchecked, it can sicken or kill dozens, perhaps even hundreds. The North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System is taking steps to combat the threat of infection – either accidental or intentional – by strengthening its emergency preparedness programs. Armed with a Department of Defense grant, the 15-hospital health system has selected TheraDoc, a Salt Lake City-based clinical informatics company that develops and implements electronic surveillance systems that can detect and help prevent infections.

"Hospital-acquired infection surveillance is such a hot topic," says Stan Pestotnik, TheraDoc's president and CEO. "It's really beyond any kind of a manual process."

TheraDoc, launched in 1999, is now installed in 141 hospitals in 27 states, says Pestotnik. It offers software that interfaces with existing health information systems to track patient conditions and detect adverse conditions and threats to public safety. It also offers clinical support tools to help staff deal quickly with infection outbreaks, and supports data-mining to spot potential infection threats and stop them before they occur.

Faced with threats ranging from bioterrorism to E. coli to influenza, hospitals and healthcare networks are turning to automated systems to monitor the threat of infections and control them should they become evident. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 2 million infections are acquired each year in hospital settings, and those infections cause about 90,000 deaths. Financially, hospital-based infections accounted for about \$4.5 billion in excess healthcare costs in 2005, according to the CDC.

According to Pestotnik, some 15 states now require mandatory reporting of all hospital-acquired infections, while another 17 states have bills pending in the legislature.

On Long Island, TheraDoc will work with FirstWatch of Encinitas, Calif., which offers a real-time situational awareness and surveillance software system now deployed in 60 cities throughout North America. According to a press release, TheraDoc's database will be leveraged by FirstWatch to identify potential outbreaks, "provide graphic rendering of geographic disease activity" and allow for automated wireless notification of emergency preparedness personnel in the event of an outbreak. This will make it possible for the health system to collaborate with other agencies to monitor public safety trends and threats.

"In any outbreak, time is of the essence in containing, isolating and treating illness," said Brian O'Neil, senior vice president of emergency medical services at North Shore-Long Island. "These two surveillance platforms, working in conjunction, will provide us the ability to see trends in real-time and respond more quickly. We can quickly graph disease management from the point of entry into the healthcare system to the point of discharge."