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## Press Releases

# Sutter's New Electronic System Causes Serious Disruptions to Safe Patient Care at E. Bay Hospitals

*California Nurses Association Press Release, 7/11/13*

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Introduction of a new electronic medical records system at Sutter corporation East Bay hospitals has produced multiple problems with safe care delivery that has put patients at risk, charged the California Nurses Association today.

Problems with technology are not unique to health care – pilots of the ill fated Asiana airline that tragically crashed at San Francisco International Airport July 6 told federal investigators that an automatic throttle failed to keep the jetliner at the proper speed for landing, the Los Angeles Times reported July 9.

In over 100 reports submitted by RNs at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center facilities in Berkeley and Oakland, nurses cited a variety of serious problems with the new system, known as Epic. The reports are in union forms RNs submit to management documenting assignments they believe to be unsafe.

Patient care concerns included computerized delays in timely administration of medications and contact with physicians, ability to properly monitor patients, and other delays in treatment.

Many noted that the excessive amount of time required to interact with the computer system, inputting and accessing data, sharply cuts down on time they can spend with patients with frequent complaints from patients about not seeing their RN.

"EPIC is a system that is so cumbersome to use for nurses and physicians, that we often feel as though we are caring for a computer, not a patient," said Thorild Urdal, an RN at Alta Bates Summit's hospital in Berkeley. "It delays care and treatment, the program is naturally counter-intuitive and it was clearly not designed in concert with nurses and physicians."

"The Epic program developed and implemented by Sutter is neither nurse or patient friendly," said Alta Bates Summit Oakland RN Mike Hill. "Epic does not enhance my ability to chart instead it takes time away from the bedside and my patients and preventing me from providing the absolute best care that they and I expect from me as a nurse."

Sutter CEO Pat Fry last year told the San Francisco Business Times that Sutter will spend \$1

billion on Epic, a system that has sparked controversy at several other hospitals, including a Contra Costa facility where several RNs cited serious medical errors in testimony to county supervisors last August.

At Alta Bates Summit specific incidents directly related to Epic problems included:

- A patient who had to be transferred to the intensive care unit due to delays in care caused by the computer.
- A nurse who was not able to obtain needed blood for an emergent medical emergency.
- Insulin orders set erroneously by the software.
- Missed orders for lab tests for newborn babies and an inability for RNs to spend time teaching new mothers how to properly breast feed babies before patient discharge.
- Lab tests not done in a timely manner.
- Frequent short staffing caused by time RNs have to spend with the computers.
- Orders incorrectly entered by physicians requiring the RNs to track down the physician before tests can be done or medication ordered.
- Discrepancies between the Epic computers and the computers that dispense medications causing errors with medication labels and delays in administering medications.
- Patient information, including vital signs, missing in the computer software.
- An inability to accurately chart specific patient needs or conditions because of pre-determined responses by the computer software.
- Multiple problems with RN fatigue because of time required by the computers and an inability to take rest breaks as a result.
- Inadequate RN training and orientation.

Hospitals nationally are spending tens of billions of dollars on technology systems, especially on electronic health records (EHR) programs for which they also receive federal financial incentives.

EHR programs are paraded as a panacea for reducing medical errors and cutting costs, but in life the promise is falling short in both areas.

A RAND corporation analysis earlier this year said visions of savings and improved efficiency in patient care have had what the New York Times called "mixed results, at best."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has acknowledged getting hundreds of reports of problems involving health information technology including numerous patient injuries and deaths.

Some examples seen at hospitals across the country:

- At Marin General Hospital in Northern California, RNs called on the Marin Healthcare District board to delay implementation of their EHR system. "Orders are being inadvertently passed to the wrong patients. People have gotten meds when they've been allergic to them. This is

dangerous," Marin RN Barbara Ryan said in comments reported by the Marin Independent Journal.

- In Chicago, the Chicago Tribune in 2011 reported on a patient death at Advocate Lutheran General hospital after an automated machine prepared an intravenous solution containing a massive overdose of sodium chloride — more than 60 times the amount ordered by a physician.
- At Affinity Medical Center RNs in Massillon, Oh. RNs in June raised multiple objections to the hurried introduction of an EHR system. Subsequently, they have cited medication errors, delays in care, problems with documentation, computers crashing, and other concerns.

**California (<http://www.nationalnursesunited.org/state/california>)** Press Releases

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