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News

AMC goes metric for patient safety

For some of us, confusing an English and a metric measurement can result in a pleasant surprise: an 18-inch trout sounds more impressive at 45.7 centimeters. After a moment, we can figure out that both measurements indicate the same length. No harm is done.

But the potential for confusing two measurement systems presents an unacceptable risk when caring for patients. Consistency is vital in patient care at Austin Medical Center part of Mayo Health System so a single system of measures must be used at all times. At Austin Medical Center, that system will soon be all metric.

Austin Medical Center is taking measures to help reduce the potential for patient safety errors, which will include switching to an all metric system.

Cynthia Dube, M.D., Austin Medical Center medical director, says switching from a dual environment of measurement (English and metric measurements) to a single measurement environment (metric system) will decrease the potential for patient safety errors and increase quality patient care.

All patient measures (height and weight) will only be recorded in metric units, and devices related to patient care will display only metric units, says Dr. Dube. Currently, some devices display both English and metric units and these are being modified to display metric units only. The metric system is the measurement system of science, and most of the world uses this system to weigh and measure everything from new babies to battleships.

Austin Medical Center, along with Mayo Clinic, are some of the first medical institutions in the United States to change to the metric system for patient care a change that will improve patient safety because all measures related to a patient will be consistent from one episode of care to another.

Switching to an all metric system will ensure that we have a standardization of care within Mayo Health System and Mayo Clinic, says Dr. Dube. Using one system for all patient care measures ensures consistency, which is an important component in patient safety.

Materials are being developed for patients and staff at Austin Medical Center to help explain the metric system.

Sidebar:

The metric system is based on units of 10, which makes it easy to use. The basic units are meters (for length), grams (for weight) and liters (for volume). One meter is a little bit longer than a yard (1.1 yards), one gram is a little bit heavier than a paper clip, and one liter is about the same volume as one quart (1.06 quarts). Because a gram is such a small measure, when people or large objects are weighed they are measured in kilograms, which equals about 2.2 pounds.

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