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Norwood Hospital's LifeBox

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was sometimes reluctant to engage in casual conversation with his caregivers.

Carla Oberst, M.D., the hospitalist liaison to the LifeBox project, observes, "When we ask patients about who they are, they become whole persons in our eyes again."

The LifeBox information was included in Mr. M's discharge paperwork when he transitioned to a short-term rehab facility. Clinicians at this next level of care welcomed Mr. M as a whole person, not as an unknown patient with a medical problem. A Bible was waiting for Mr. M on his bedside table when he arrived at the rehabilitation facility and added a personal sense of welcome.

Rooted in its mission goal of delivering quality patient care with compassion and respect, Norwood Hospital has created LifeBox as a way of preserving and transmitting information about "who a person is as a person," including the patient's wishes, values and goals.

LifeBox is a collaborative effort of Norwood Hospital and 13 other health care partners.

In January 2010, Mr. M benefited from being part of this pilot project, which is funded by a grant from the Kenneth B. Schwartz Center, a Boston-based not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting compassionate care. Shortly after admission to Norwood Hospital, the hospitalist caring for him sat down with Mr. M to have a conversation aimed not at eliciting medical history, but at getting to know Mr. M as a person.

The hospitalist learned that the patient, who lived in an outbuilding on a friend's property, considered himself a contented loner. He spent his free time reading, especially the Bible, and occasionally did odd jobs for local residents. He had lived his entire life in this region. He regretted the transformation of his quiet rural community into an upscale suburban town. Mr. M was anxious to return to an independent living environment, but worried that his health problems would make this difficult to do.

This 10-minute conversation subtly, but definitively, altered the physician-patient relationship. Now the hospitalist was not just caring for the patient in Room 2119 with urosepsis; she was caring for Mr. M., a unique individual with a health problem. The hospitalist entered the information on "who Mr. M is as a person" into a LifeBox, a dedicated section of the patient's electronic medical record. Clinicians in the hospital could access LifeBox information to quickly establish a relationship with Mr. M who

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Nationally, many programs are looking at improving care transitions as patients move from one care setting to another. The LifeBox project is unique because it looks not at the transmission of the medical facts of a patient's record, but rather information about the essence of that person. The LifeBox collaborative has created a training video for hospitalists and a second video to educate patients, families and primary care physicians on the value of having a LifeBox.

The LifeBox project reflects the compassionate ministry of Catholic health care by focusing on each patient as an individual. A LifeBox enables providers and patients to experience medicine at its compassionate best.

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