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Veterans Benefit by Using New Method for PICC

Veterans treated at VA Western New York Healthcare System can benefit from implementation of the ECG Waveform Tip Confirmation System (TCS) used to locate placement of a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC). It is the first hospital in the region to use the technology. A physician may order a PICC for patients that need intravenous nutrition, antibiotic therapy and some chemotherapy regimens.

The method used for finding the tip of the PICC is by x-ray. The new method approved by the FDA is a device that provides real-time PICC tip location information by using the patient's cardiac electrical activity. The system is faster and allows for more accurate placement, which is better for the patient and allows for quicker use of the line.

Because a PICC is centrally located, a patient can receive treatment that could not be obtained by a standard intravenous access. Through the minimally invasive procedure, patients also receive the benefits of less discomfort and decreased complication risk. Additionally, PICC lines last much longer than other central or periphery access devices.

The technology uses the electrical pattern from the patient's heartbeat (EKG) to allow nurses and health care professionals to pinpoint the exact location of the catheter's tip. Two clinical studies have found the system to be 97 percent accurate on the first try.

"By monitoring a patient's heartbeat and ECG pattern, the PICC nurses can pinpoint the catheter tip's location, which reduces the radiation exposure to patients and shortens the time the procedure takes," noted Michele Ford RN, Nurse Manager for the PICC Team.

VA Western New York Healthcare System uses a PICC team comprised of five specially trained registered nurses, who place an average of 40 PICC lines per month. The nurses learned about the new device and took the initiative to become the first hospital in the Western New York region and the 37th hospital in the nation to begin using the technology.

"This technology allows us to offer state-of-the-art quality care for our patients and in most cases allows us to eliminate the need for a chest x-ray to confirm the accurate placement of the PICC line," said Ford.

PICC lines are inserted into a vein in the patient's upper body, then advanced through increasingly larger veins toward the heart until the tip of the line rests in the desired location. The PICC team nurses provide the procedure to inpatients as well as patients treated on an outpatient basis.

The five-member team includes Sherrie Parish, RN, Mary Rieman, RN, Theresa Nati, RN, Terry Maclin, RN, and Kathleen Arnold RN. The team also provides routine intravenous line insertions and phlebotomy throughout the facility.

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