

I SEE YOU IN THE ICU

By Kelly Swan

The pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) team at the University of Maryland Children's Hospital (UMCH) created PICU Connect, a mobile cart fashioned with a computer, speaker and 180-degree camera. It allows family members who can't be at their child's hospital bedside to feel like they are in the room. The technology uses high quality, real-time video and audio, and links through a person's phone, tablet or computer. The family member can clearly see, listen and talk with the child and care team, so they aren't missing important discussions about the child's care plan. It's HIPAA-compliant, the video sessions cannot be recorded or intercepted, and they disappear once they are over. The project is part of the University of Maryland Medical Center's ICU family-centered care initiative, which recognizes the central importance of family to patients' recovery.

The dilemma: Courtney Agnoli was on her way to the hospital to be with her newborn, Tessa, who has congenital heart disease. A late-season snowstorm dumped several inches of snow across Maryland, making the roads slippery and dangerous at times. Agnoli's car slid on the highway. She felt it wasn't safe, so she turned around and went home. It would be the first day since Tessa was born her mother couldn't be with her. So the medical team offered the next best thing. After downloading Zoom, a free video conferencing app, to her smartphone and inputting a one-time access code, Agnoli "joined" her daughter and the medical team via a secure, private connection. Mother and care team could hear each other clearly, and Agnoli could see everything in the room.

You can't do pediatric care without the parents there: Jason Custer, M.D., director of patient safety at UMMC and medical director of the PICU came up with the idea for PICU Connect two years ago after talking with faculty and staff about perceived barriers to having families participate in rounds on

the hospital unit. Providing parents with a convenient way to "FaceTime" their kids seemed like a way to alleviate some of their anxiety. After researching existing technologies and coming up empty-handed, Custer, along with Shari Simone, DNP, CPNP-AC, and his team decided to build it themselves. They went to the telemedicine department at UMMC and shared their vision. The telemedicine team confirmed the technology could be built in-house and would cost about \$6,000. The PICU team decided to use money they raised through their annual golf tournament to cover the cost.

Finding uses in adult care: The technology is now offered in the adult medical intensive care unit. The Kamryn Lambert Foundation, a longtime supporter of UMCH, provided fund-



PICU Connect provides parents the opportunity to see their child and visit with health care providers, even if they can't be at the hospital.

ing for an additional PICU Connect machine. Plans are underway to further expand it to all 11 of UMMC's intensive care units.

Endless possibilities: Hospitals could also use the technology to bring the family into the room for sterile medical procedures when it isn't possible to have them physically there. And health care teams could use it to better communicate among each other when patients are transported to different units or from the ER or to another hospital.

Kelly Swan is a writer at University of Maryland Health System.

Send questions or comments to magazine@childrenshospitals.org.