

Earthquake retrofit had silver security lining



But in this case, the retrofit had a silver lining. The relocated unit would itself be upgraded with a state-of-the-art electronic security system, designed to keep patients safe and parents reassured. This was great news to staff at the public district hospital, for which electronic security had been a long-standing part of the culture.

Salinas Valley Memorial first adopted monitoring technology in 2002, when hospital directors approved the installation of an effective, efficient multi-unit electronic monitoring system called MyChild® by McRoberts Security Technologies (formerly Prosec Protection Systems).

The system was installed in all areas in the five-story hospital where children were patients – labor and delivery, mother and baby, neonatal intensive care, and pediatrics. Since then, every patient under eight years old has been issued a tag at the time of admission, as part of hospital policy. Every parent receives and signs a form confirming their understanding of security policies and approaches when their child is admitted.

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The Touku area Pacific Coast earthquake in Japan clearly reminded us why institutions located near fault lines need extra reinforcement. Retrofitting existing structures for earthquake readiness can lead to dramatic changes. Case in point: the 58-year-old Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System. This 269-bed hospital discovered its retrofit would result in a new support structure in the middle of its existing neonatal intensive care unit. So, there was no choice but to move the unit to an entirely new location in the hospital.

Perhaps Salinas Valley Memorial’s commitment to security is why it’s never experienced an abduction. Surrounded by bucolic countryside and farmland, the city itself (pop. 100,000) is a far cry from bustling urban centers most people would associate with abductions. But that stereotype doesn’t hold water – abductions are often family-related matters, and those are as prevalent in rural America as they are in cities.

As well, the myth that only the obstetric department needs to be secured was shattered long ago. Back in 1987, Carlina White, then just 19 days old, was snatched from a hospital's emergency ward in New York City. Americans everywhere stood in amazement earlier this year as television crews filmed Carlina miraculously reunited with her family, after all those years. The incident further raised the consciousness of security directors and professional staff everywhere, not to mention families.

"Abduction is always a concern," says Pat Valenzano, Director of Women's/Children's Services for Salinas Valley Memorial, "and when it happens elsewhere, it makes everyone take a closer look at their own systems."

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The upgraded system in the new neonatal intensive care unit at Salinas Valley Memorial is centered on radio frequency technology. Every newborn is outfitted with a lightweight tag slightly larger than a postage stamp, and about an eighth-inch thick. At regular intervals, the tag, which weighs less than an ounce, emits a signal to a room-mounted receiver, identifying the baby's location. Every exit point of the protected unit is electronically monitored to detect tags. This means staff and visitors can move about freely, but no one can remove a monitored infant without authorization.

At Salinas Valley Memorial, up to 24 patients may be wearing tags at any one time. With most stays being quite short - mothers and babies are discharged after about two days - the infants don't wear the tags for long.

Sometimes the babies need procedures that require them to leave the protected area temporarily. When that happens, the MyChild tag is noted as "in transport" from the system for up to three hours by an authorized nursing team leader. Recent software enhancements allow the system to recognize a patient in transport mode for an unlimited and configurable duration. During transport mode the MyChild system keeps track of which infant has been removed and will send out an alert if the child is not returned on time.



If someone tries leaving with a baby, an alarm is triggered that locks exit doors and stops elevators from running.

Valenzano says electronic security gives parents additional peace of mind. But, she underlines, it's just one tool of many that helps the hospital keep patients safe and secure.

"It's the people who make the system work," says Valenzano. "Electronic security systems are additional ears and eyes, to make good security even better."

About McRoberts Security Technologies

With hundreds of systems installed in hospitals across North America, McRoberts has established itself as a trusted industry leader with the experience, expertise, and a proven track record that healthcare professionals can rely on.

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