

Baby's First Cell Phone?

No, Hospital's Groundbreaking Infant Security System

Laura Berritto, manager of Watsonville Community Hospital's intensive care nursery, thinks a lot about the safety of the little people in her unit. That's why she is almost as excited about the new state-of-art security system that practically gives each newborn his or her own "belly button" cell phone.

WCH has installed a security system that tracks the location of all newborns and pediatric patients on the two hospital floors where many of the Central Coast's newest residents begin life. In the past, security bands at all hospitals were simple alarms that activated if an infant was taken out an exit but provided no further information.

The key to WCH's state-of-the-art My Child Infant Protection Solution, installed at a cost of more than \$200,000, is that the system operates by tracking location, not motion, as other systems do. Numbers on the devices are assigned to each baby and match mom and dad's wristbands. If an enthusiastic parent walks too close to an exit and triggers the alarm, staff can immediately determine which baby and which exit are triggering the alarm by matching the number on the device to the wristband, said Sherri Stout-Torres, chief nursing officer.

With some 25 or more infants and their parents in the hospital each day, both Berritto and Janet Windt, the director of perinatal services, both figure the devices are just the latest way to make sure their charges are safe from abduction.

In the past, ankle bands used for security needed regular adjustment to make sure they wouldn't fall off or be pulled off, said Berritto, who has wrestled with that security problem throughout her 22 years in nursing, a year and a half leading WCH's ICN.

MyChild-IP supports unique dual tamper sensing ankle/wrist tags, along with McRoberts Security Technologies' *exclusive* Umbilical tags. The umbilical tag, used for all newborns, attaches to a clamp that all infants have placed on their umbilical cords routinely after birth. There are no nerve endings in the umbilical cord, so there is no discomfort. About the diameter of a quarter, the devices fall off on their own after a few weeks or can be removed using a customized tool. "But it's almost impossible for a potential abductor to even try and remove one of these transmitters without attracting attention," said Windt. In older babies or children, the upgraded sensor can still be attached via a wristband as it tracks the patient's location in real time.

If an infant or child is moved, the RFID technology (like a cell phone) broadcasts the newborn or pediatric patient's location to computers in the unit. Details of the alarm/computer interface, which replaced the more basic alarm-only sensors in the neonatal and pediatric units on Feb. 16, are confidential for security reasons, said John Burke, WCH facilities director. And normal cuddling or moving around in the bed won't let the sensor flick off a newborn, noted Stout-Torres.

Burke said the system not only unobtrusively informs nurses and other staff where every child is located but will even be used to track expensive

medical equipment. Take a patient (or a heart monitor or computer) out of the newborn, well baby, or maternity areas, and the transmitter automatically triggers alarms and shuts down elevators. If someone attempts to leave with a baby or an older child wearing the device, the security camera at the exit records the abductor's image, which is immediately flagged and made available to security.

"The chip and computer/alarm interface the most advanced security in the state, and while newborn abductions are extremely rare — we've never had one here at Watsonville Community Hospital — we can do no less at our hospital than provide the highest level of security and comfort to our families," said WCH Acting CEO Jae Dale, who admits he's *almost* as excited as his staff.

The devices, connected wirelessly to the hospital's computer and security systems, "have been a key factor in deterring a number of abductions at other hospitals," said Joe Conti, vice president of sales for McRoberts Security Technologies, Lakewood, N.J., manufacturer of the MyChild-IP (infant protection) device.

"There have been a number of foiled abductions around the country because the perpetrator couldn't find a way to remove the device and therefore just gave up and left," Conti said.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, based in Alexandria, Virginia, reports that between 1983 and Jan. 5, 2009, 14 babies were abducted from hospitals, a small number, "but something we will do everything in our power to always prevent here," said Stout-Torres.

“And to be able to provide security by giving a baby his or her first cellular device, well, that’s just a fun bonus,” Berritto added.

Founded in 1895, Watsonville Community Hospital is home to The Birthplace where women labor, deliver, recover and receive postpartum care all in one– almost double than the other two hospitals in Santa Cruz County combined

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