



# Lafayette General Medical Center Giving Nurses the Gift of Time

## Overview

### Customer

Lafayette General Medical Center

### Location

Lafayette, LA

### EMR Partner

Cerner Electronic Medical Record

### Customer Profile

With over 350 beds, Lafayette General Medical Center (Lafayette) is part of Lafayette General Health (LGH), a regional healthcare network serving south central Louisiana.

### Key Business

#### Outcomes

The facility standardization on Welch Allyn Connex Vital Signs Monitors was aimed at improving patient safety, care and efficiency, while also maximizing an investment in the Cerner Electronic Medical Record (EMR) and meeting the requirements of Meaningful Use.

*The following presents the opinions of staff at Lafayette General Medical Center based on their experience using Welch Allyn Connex® Vital Signs Monitors.*

## Introduction

With over 350 beds, Lafayette General Medical Center (Lafayette) is part of Lafayette General Health (LGH), a regional healthcare network serving south central Louisiana. The facility has standardized on Welch Allyn Connex Vital Signs Monitors (VSM) in an effort to improve patient safety, care and efficiency, while also maximizing its investment in the Cerner Electronic Medical Record (EMR) and meeting the requirements of Meaningful Use. According to the staff at Lafayette, utilizing the Connex VSM has resulted in benefits in all of these areas. However, the benefit that has been most noted is a simple one: Welch Allyn Connex VSM gave nurses at Lafayette General Medical Center the gift of time.

## Making an Impact on the Med/Surg Floor

A nurse's time is valuable—and there's quite simply never enough of it. This is particularly true on the average medical/surgical floor, an area that serves the majority of patients, driving significant revenue and generating the majority of patient satisfaction opinions from patients and their families. Med/Surg nurses often make up the majority of caregivers in any given facility, and they juggle a staggering variety of responsibilities—all of which consume valuable time. Med/Surg nurses manage many patients daily—with a variety of different, and increasingly more acute, conditions. Hospitals realize the benefits of increasing nurses' time at the bedside, caring for and educating patients, informing families and using their training to identify important changes in patient health. However, this can't happen effectively when nurses are bogged down

with time consuming tasks—such as the manual capture and recording of patient vital signs. This was the situation at Lafayette until the introduction of Welch Allyn Connex gave the nursing staff more time.

In Lafayette's experience, the time given back to nurses has helped to enhance patient care. "The Connex system has definitely improved patient outcome for us because it has given us back time. You need more time as a healthcare provider. Patients are getting sicker and sicker. When you've given nurses back 30 minutes through a system that actually downloads the information immediately—there's no writing down the information and having to go back and input that information because you've taken out that step. You've added time to their plates, which means you've given patients back time when healthcare providers are at their bedside," said Jamie Gonzales, nurse clinical educator. "Everybody needs this system. It's that important."

"We are caring for patients who come to us sicker than ever before, so we're putting a lot on healthcare providers to get their jobs done in a timely manner," continued Gonzales. "Giving nurses back 30 minutes from a system that downloads information immediately—without having to write anything down or go back and input information—is adding time to their plates. This means it's giving patients back time where healthcare providers can be at the bedside. This improves outcomes. It helps meet Quality Care measures, and it makes nurses available when patients need them, which, in turn, improves patient outcomes."

### Importance of Vital Signs

Vital signs are the building blocks of everything nurses do. They are just that—vital to painting a picture for healthcare providers to give excellent care to the patient. Vital signs deliver information that might otherwise not be so easily delineated just by looking at a patient and can give information

that is sometimes unknown. They are key to identifying changes in patient health or determining when and if medications are required. Physicians, too, depend on vital signs to make sound medical decisions. Often, physicians are frustrated if vital signs information is not immediately and accurately available to them.

"A physician is going to start with vitals. When a patient presents in an acute care setting, a physician wants to know 'What are the vitals?' That's always the first question," said Gonzales. "Physicians use vital signs when they prescribe medication. They use them when they determine whether or not to give certain treatments or whether or not to give blood. They don't just go by a lab value. It may look like a patient needs blood, but a physician will use vitals to see if the patient is truly symptomatic. He or she will ask, 'Does this patient truly need that treatment?' based on the patient's vital signs."

Since Lafayette converted to Welch Allyn Connex VSMs, the facility has observed a significant increase in staff and patient satisfaction. Most importantly, use of the Connex VSM helped free up nurses time. Nurses quickly experienced a significant time savings on labor-intensive tasks, and that savings translated into more time for patient care. The quick and accurate capture of patient vitals and the automatic data transfer to the EMR is designed to help all but eliminate the possibility of human error—to save time and enhance safety. Once nurses started using the Connex VSM and saw how easy it was to use, they immediately wanted more. They didn't want to use anything else.

"My advice to other sites considering this system would be to buy a lot of them," said Gonzales. "They are such an asset to the floors. Since we've had the Connex System, we've found that not having enough monitors and forcing staff to revert to using older models has actually decreased employee satisfaction. Everyone loves these monitors, and they truly want more of them. Certainly, every

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hospital has to decide how much to spend and how many monitors to buy, but I would consider revamping every monitor in the house with the Connex System because it adds so much to the bottom line when you consider outcomes. Your money comes back to you by using the Connex System.”

### Post-Op: Keeping Patients Out of the ICU

The Welch Allyn Connex System also was incorporated into the post-op areas at Lafayette, where quick and accurate vital signs are especially critical for patients just recovering from surgical procedures as both inpatients and through one-day surgeries. Post-surgery, patients need to be closely and accurately monitored for a short period of time before being safely discharged or transferred

to another unit. Often, patients are monitored as often as every three minutes—which consumes a large portion of a nurse’s time. The Connex System allows nurses in post-op areas to set specific time intervals and other parameters, so vital signs are automatically captured and recorded into the EMR as often as deemed necessary. Eliminating manual documentation of vitals on patients who typically spend only an hour on the post-op unit allows nurses to spend more time on patient education, support and discharge planning.

“Vital signs are important in the perioperative area because a lot of our patients are going to sleep, so we need this information to let us know the patients’ status, as often they are not able to communicate with us. It’s very important that we get the base line vital signs before the procedure, and then we are able to continue monitoring for any changes in their status, especially if they are not able to give us verbal information,” said Kim Dooley, RN, clinical nurse manager. “Electronic vital signs monitoring has helped us to improve efficiencies for the nurses who might have three or four patients post-operatively. They are able to spend time with each patient—still checking vital signs frequently but not having to run to a computer each time to chart. It has definitely improved the workflow. And, patients have been discharged much more quickly because we haven’t had to spend time charting and all the paperwork is complete.”

### Accurate Vitals Help Prove Meaningful Use

The adoption of the Welch Allyn Connex System assists Lafayette General with meeting the criteria for Meaningful Use under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Automated vitals are particularly helpful in validating if a facility is using its EMR in a meaningful way. “This system has improved several things for us. The efficiency alone, having that readily available to healthcare providers, is a big piece of it, but the accuracy is also another big piece. You’re cutting out a person accidentally documenting the wrong vitals on the

wrong patient. Meaningful Use in so many ways depends on the accuracy of information and information availability—and the fact that you know the information is getting to that patient's chart," said Gonzales. "You've got the patient at the bedside. You're using the patient identifiers. You know it's accurate and efficient. The margin of error is almost non-existent with this system, which improves Meaningful Use tremendously.

### Information Systems: "Go Ahead and Take That Plunge."

The Information Systems (IS) Department at Lafayette was an important player in making the transition to the Welch Allyn Connex System. IS understood the need for using connected devices to maximize the hospital's investment in the Cerner EHR, but, initially, its staff had reservations.

"At first, the idea of interfacing medical devices with the EMR was somewhat intimidating for us, but it went very smoothly," said Joanie Foss, applications manager, information systems. "My advice would be to go ahead and take that plunge. It's certainly worth the investment of time and resources."

According to Foss, the conversion to Welch Allyn Connex required only a minimal commitment compared to other IS projects the facility has tackled. This was thanks to a close working relationship with Welch Allyn representatives, who were on site to convert to the Connex System and make sure all devices worked properly and seamlessly with the existing Cerner EMR. Welch Allyn representatives remained on site to assist in quickly orienting the nursing staff on the use of the Connex VSM.

"The training for nurses was short. It was not extremely involved," said Foss. "The screens are easy to read and understand. Our nurses deal with devices all day long and are extremely familiar with our technology, so it went quickly. However, we did train nurse extenders who had less training on electronic devices, but, because the Welch Allyn

device is so easy to use, we didn't have a lot of issues. It's very user-friendly."

From bedside to the IS Department, Lafayette feels that the Welch Allyn Connex has provided a host of benefits to their Center, including giving nurses time to spend with their patients, providing up-to-date and accurate data to the Cerner EMR and helping the hospital to meet the requirements of Meaningful Use. The Center has experienced positive differences in efficiency and patient care, thanks to a system that gave nurses something truly valuable—time.

"With the Welch Allyn Connex System, being accurate with vital signs is a huge piece of making sure you're developing the right plan of care. So again, you're taking away the margin of error. You're taking away the possibility of not having the right information. Your data is accurate, it's at your fingertips, and it's available to multiple healthcare users at the same time," Gonzales said. "You don't care about where you are. You could be a physician at home. You could be a nurse at a computer or at another patient's bedside. That alone is going to ensure that you make the right choices for your patients—and that's a huge win for us with the Welch Allyn Connex System."

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