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Metric measures now the rule at Children's Hospital

October 17, 2008



The Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt has fully converted to the metric system. Here, Chris Duben, R.N., uses a metric tape to measure Champ. (photo by Susan Army)

by Carole Bartoo

This month the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt completed a full conversion to the metric system of measurement.

While the hospital had already been using the metric system about 90 percent of the time, the change to 100 percent was made because of the way medications are prescribed for children, said Pat Givens, R.N., chief nursing officer for Children's Hospital.

"There has been an alert from the Joint Commission (accreditation organization) stating that a key area to impact pediatric patient safety was consistent measurement of body size. We know that the infant age group is at highest risk for medication errors that involve size or weight, so it was important that we make this change complete."

Among the changes that took place at Children's Hospital: all scales have been fixed so they will measure only in grams and kilograms; all thermometers are set on Celsius, rather than Fahrenheit; all measuring tapes and sticks are metric; all observational measurements are in metric; and all documentations are recorded using the metric system.

But Givens said the hospital continues to keep in mind that the public uses the standard, or U.S. customary system, of measurement.

"The Emergency Department staff and also in the newborn nursery, nurses have 'tag buddies,' or cards they carry. On the card are basic conversions so that if, for example, a new mother wants to know her baby's weight in pounds and ounces the nurse can quickly convert it for her."

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Editorial tool created by the Eskind Biomedical Library Web Team

Last modified: Monday, 31 March 2008 <webmaster@www.mc.Vanderbilt.Edu>