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### Isabel will tell what ails you

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LOMA LINDA - Ever been to the doctor and wondered if you were given the wrong diagnosis? It's not just your imagination.

One in six people has been misdiagnosed, according to health surveys.

Loma Linda University Children's Hospital is pioneering a new technology to address that problem.

The system allows doctors to input symptoms into a computer, which immediately produces the top possible diagnoses.

Loma Linda, which started using the support system last year, is the first Southern California hospital to implement the technology.

Dr. Richard Chinnock, professor and chairman of pediatrics at the children's hospital, uses the Isabel system as a teaching tool in his classroom.

He also uses it when a patient presents him with "a bizarre or confusing set of symptoms," he said.

Chinnock, who has been on the faculty at Loma Linda since 1989, said the technology allows him to consider the entire range of alternatives when deciding how to treat a patient.

"For me, the metabolic diseases are the most difficult to diagnose," he said. "I want to be sure I'm not going to miss any one of the possible diagnoses. That's why Isabel is so good."

Isabel is similar to Google, a popular Internet search engine. While Google searches Web pages, Isabel searches a database of more than 11,000 diagnoses and 4,000 medications to come up with treatment options.

For example, Chinnock said, the system is especially helpful in offering diagnoses for Kawasaki disease, which predominately affects young children. There is no specific blood test for the disease, he said, and it is difficult to establish the diagnosis, especially early in the course of the illness.

Chinnock, 51, said he has no financial relationship with Isabel Health Care Inc., the Reston, Va., company that developed the technology in 2002.

The \$30,000 annual cost for the system is being paid this year by the Children's Hospital. Last year, the cost was shared between the hospital, the Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Information Services at Loma Linda University Medical Center.

The system was inspired by the misdiagnosis of co-founder Jason Maude's 3-year-old daughter, Isabel, at a London hospital in 1999. Isabel nearly died of necrotizing fasciitis, commonly known as flesh-eating bacteria, as a complication of chicken pox.

She had been treated by her family physician and an emergency room doctor at a hospital - but neither made the correct diagnosis.

Isabel was rushed to a children's intensive-care unit after her heart, lungs, kidneys and liver started to fail.

It was Dr. Joseph Britto, the other co-founder of Isabel Health Care, who treated her there and helped save her life.

After the ordeal, Maude and Britto got together and decided to do something to prevent similar diagnosis errors in the future.

"As doctors, we tend to rely almost exclusively on what we carry in our minds," Britto said. "None of us is perfect. We've all made mistakes. That's where this technology helps. By making the right diagnosis and the right decisions, we could treat the illness earlier."

Britto said about 20 hospitals across the country are using the Isabel system.

He expects other medical institutions to come on board as they become familiar with the technology and its importance.

Britto encourages patients to ask their doctors if they have considered other reasonable possibilities beyond the initial diagnosis.

"We need more patients saying, 'Doctor, have you Isabeled my case? You say I'm suffering from a certain thing. What else can it be?'"

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