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Rachel Rowe: Data on local hospital performance are widely available in NH

By RACHEL ROWE

[Friday, Apr. 4, 2008](#)

FOR THE PAST four years, hospitals have voluntarily reported how often patients at their institutions have received the recommended care for heart attacks, congestive heart failure and community-acquired pneumonia. They also report how often patients undergoing certain surgical procedures receive appropriate antibiotics to prevent an infection.

The Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have identified over 20 processes of care for these conditions that have been proven to increase the chance that patients have a positive outcome. Hospitals report on compliance using a standardized data collection methodology.

Consumers can learn how often hospitals deliver the recommended care by accessing the federal Web site, www.hospitalcompare.gov. The national average rates as well as individual state averages are also reported. Based on these data, the Journal of the American Medical Association ranked New Hampshire No. 1 overall in the country.

This clinical information is also reported on www.nhqualitycare.org, a Web site dedicated to care provided by New Hampshire's hospitals. NHQualityCare.org publicly reports these data for all 26 acute care hospitals, large and small.

NHQualitycare also reports the numbers of patients treated at each hospital for heart attacks, congestive heart failure and community-acquired pneumonia as well as the percent who receive all of the necessary care.

New Hampshire is the only state to go far beyond what the federal government reports. This expanded reporting demonstrates hospitals' commitment to offering information that will help people become more informed consumers of health care. Patients have a right to know what type of care they should expect and why those treatments are important. And hospitals benefit tremendously by continually evaluating themselves and sharing best practices with each other.

Measuring clinical quality is challenging. It requires adjusting for how sick patients are when they are admitted, the small numbers of patients with any one diagnosis or procedure, and the multiple physicians treating a patient. When it comes to the reporting of infection data, hospitals in New Hampshire support infection reporting when the methods for defining and collecting infection data are standardized. If every hospital or state uses different guidelines, the comparative information reported is meaningless.

Despite the challenges, New Hampshire hospitals are proactive in collaborating to identify and share the best practices for preventing infections. In 2005, the Legislature passed a bill establishing the New Hampshire Health Care Quality Assurance Commission. The commission enables health care providers to share information about adverse patient outcomes and effective clinical practices. This legislation has been pivotal in bringing hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers together to identify opportunities for improving care.

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New Hampshire health care professionals believe that we can continue to improve care through a thoughtful and systematic approach to publicly reporting evidence-based measures and using that data to learn from each other.

Rachel Rowe is associate executive director of the Foundation for Healthy Communities, a not-for-profit organization organized to improve health and health care delivery in New Hampshire.

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