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Colorado gives hospitals' care a bill of health

A Web-based report card offers data on how medical centers are doing in terms of incidents and death rates.

By Katy Human
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 11/29/2007 12:45:39 AM MST



Exempla St. Joseph Hospital employees Shannon Brinker, left, and Susan Youthz help patient Ken Baughman of Miami out of bed. (RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post)

The death rates for stroke victims at St. Anthony's Central Hospital and Denver Health Medical Center were higher than average among area hospitals in 2006, according to data unveiled Wednesday.

Mortality rates for stroke patients at Exempla Lutheran Medical Center and Exempla St. Joseph Hospital were lower than average, and all patients at St. Joseph were less likely to get bedsores.

The Colorado Hospital Report Card — a joint effort between the state and the Colorado Hospital Association — is designed to give consumers more information.

Gov. Bill Ritter launched the Web-based report card in a ceremony at Denver Health.

With several clicks of a mouse, a consumer can see how many patients died at any Colorado

Hospital Quality

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hospital following heart bypass surgery, hip replacement and other procedures.

Also, there are data on the number of patients who developed pressure sores from lying in the same position for too long and lists of how many surgeries that a hospital performed. Volume is sometimes associated with expertise.

"This is more information than is available anywhere," said CHA president Steven Summer.

Exempla St. Joseph had lower-than-average mortality rates following strokes and hip

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fractures. Exempla Lutheran had a higher-than-average mortality rate following strokes, and St. Anthony's Central had a higher-than-average mortality rate following heart-artery repair.

Numbers small in cases In some cases, the numbers are very small. For example, Denver Health was higher than average in hip-replacement mortality because one of the 46 patients treated in 2006 died. The only other hospital that had hip replacement-related deaths was St. Anthony's Central, which had two among the 121 procedures done.

On most indices, almost all hospitals were rated as average.

For example, on the 11 mortality measures — for procedures such as heart attacks, pneumonia and heart bypass surgery — all Denver metro hospitals had average mortality rates.

The association compiled the data while being overseen by the state health department.

The report card also looks at the numbers of 10 procedures at each hospital and at three measures of patient safety, including bloodstream infections.

"Colorado is now leading the nation in information to empower consumer decisions," Summer said.

Fewer than a dozen other states have created similar databases — and Colorado's is the

most detailed, said Richard Haugh, spokesman for CHA.

He said Wisconsin, too, is recognized among hospital associations as a leader in compiling hospital-quality data for consumers.

Dana Richardson, vice president for quality for the Wisconsin Hospital Association, said consumers use her state's hospital-quality data less than expected.

Insurance companies and the hospitals, however, have found the data invaluable, she said.

"Hospitals can compare themselves to the hospital down the street," Richardson said. "It has created friendly competition." Insurance companies in Wisconsin are using the data to insist on quality standards, she said.

A few technical glitches Colorado's new website has a few technical glitches — about one in 20 of the Denver Post's attempts to access data encountered database errors — but the information is generally easy to understand.

Website users need four mouse clicks to compare rates of bloodstream infections acquired during hospitalization at 18 Denver-area hospitals.

By that measure, Exempla St. Joseph was the best in Denver last year. Exempla Lutheran and Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center had

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higher-than-average rates of bloodstream infection, or sepsis.

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The database was created in response to last year's House Bill 1278, sponsored by Rep. Paul Weissmann, D-Louisville, and Sen. Moe Keller, D-Wheat Ridge.

The report card builds on several years of similar data volunteered by the state's hospitals and collated by the Colorado Hospital Association and the Colorado Business Group on Health.

"I think the jury's still out on how well consumers can really use the data," said Donna Marshall, the executive director of the business group. "But I would say that hospitals can compare and contrast themselves, and set out to improve."

Ken Baughman, 59, of Miami, said he'd definitely use such data if available.

Baughman was laid up at Exempla St. Joseph in Denver on Wednesday after slipping on the ice this week while visiting his sister in Bailey. His right hip broke in three places.

Baughman said he was happy, but not surprised, to hear that Exempla St. Joseph had the metro area's lowest mortality rate following a hip fracture.

"That says a lot about this place," Baughman said. His sister has worked as a supervising nurse there for two decades.

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