

Quality Reporting Plays Major Role at all Hospitals

Something of a revolution in transparency is taking place at all hospitals. Quality is no longer just a concept, but it is a valid tool to measure performance, patient satisfaction, and improvement. Providers and patients know the implications of infection control practices and the necessity for clear, consistent communication, for example. Public and private reporting agencies work to interpret data and outcome statistics, some provided by hospitals and some gathered by government entities, in the hope of offering consumers and providers alike with useful and comparative data. What we have learned from these early years of public reporting is that no one “report card” tells the entire story and no “group of report cards” tells less of a story.

Today, nearly a dozen hospital quality report cards exist. Most draw data from government reporting entities, like the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, but most also differ in the adjustments they make to this data to account for variations in patient acuity and treatment compliance, for example, or access to health care services pre and post discharge. Others focus more heavily on administrative/billing information rather than process of care information. The resulting report cards lack uniformity and standardization, making it difficult for providers and patients to make reliable comparisons.

This is why the hospitals throughout the Hudson Valley, represented by the Northern Metropolitan Hospital Association (NorMet), support the statewide effort for the development of a national, standardized system for collecting and publicly reporting health care quality data. The national alignment of quality measures and specifications that are evidence-based and endorsed by the National Quality Forum and the Hospital Quality Alliance would be a good place to start. In the case of infections, each state reports on a different set of intensive care units and surgical procedures, as well as different time periods.

No hospital disputes the value and need for public data related to a hospital’s performance. Such disclosure drives performance improvement. Consumers, however, are best served by published data that enables them to make “apples to apples” comparisons in a straightforward manner. Some of the more recent report cards making news headlines draw from data that is several years old.

Until the day when a standardized system for collecting and reporting quality data arrives, hospitals in the Hudson Valley region will continue their aggressive quality improvement efforts and the reporting of quality data to local, state, and federal agencies as required by law. In addition, most of the region’s hospitals participate in NorMet’s Patient Safety Institute, a federally-designated patient safety organization and the first hospital-based one in New York State to receive such approval. Through the institute, hospitals, physicians, and other health care providers identify and analyze the risks and hazards associated with patient care. The institute’s members work together to uncover and share best practices and solutions. It’s all in a collaborative, non-competitive effort to improve the quality of care provided to residents throughout the Hudson Valley, and it happens every day regardless of what any one report card might tell the public.