

Consumer Reports Hospital Safety Ratings

July 6, 2012

Consumer Reports, the monthly magazine of Consumers Union, published an article in the August 2012 edition highlighting its first hospital safety ratings report. The article, titled “How Safe is Your Hospital?” includes safety ratings on 1,159 hospitals in 44 states. This represents only 18 percent of all the hospitals in the U.S. In California, 168 of 430 hospitals received patient safety scores in six categories: Infections, 30-Day Readmissions, Communication, CT Scanning Overuse, Patient Complications and Post-Discharge Mortality. Veterans Affairs and children’s hospitals were not listed in the report. Information about the report is available at: <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2012/08/how-safe-is-your-hospital/index.htm>.

Consumer Reports (CR) reviewed and rated hospitals on five quality measures based on data reported to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Ratings in the sixth quality measurement category – Infections – were based on data acquired from states and The Leapfrog Group. According to the magazine, data reporting periods “vary depending on the hospital and the rating category.” Scoring of hospitals was also “based on questions answered by millions of discharged patients in a federally mandated survey.” Interviews with patients, physicians, hospital administrators and safety experts, as well as reviews of medical literature, hospital inspections and investigations, were included in the article.

Hospitals that volunteered to participate in the *Consumer Reports* hospital safety rating process were included in the report. Participating hospitals received an overall patient safety score between 1 and 100. The August 2012 Consumers Report article shows hospital ratings in only four of the six categories, including Infections, Readmissions, Communication and CT Scanning. Hospitals could receive up to 20 total points in each of those categories, and another 10 points respectively in the Complications and Mortality categories. No hospitals in California were ranked in the “Top 10” according to the article, despite the fact that a few received a score of 68, identical to a Top 10 hospital’s score.

Following are comments from the California Hospital Association about the report and about efforts by hospitals to increase transparency of valid quality and safety information.

- California’s 430 hospitals and the California Hospital Association (CHA) support the goals of transparency and public reporting through universally recognized and accepted data collection and reporting methods. These include the CMS Partnership for Patients Program, CMS’ Hospital Compare reports, the California Department of Public Health, and the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, among others. California

hospitals currently are required to report data on 26 evidence-based measures. Many hospitals voluntarily report data on 50 measures or more. These measures are available to the public.

- The metrics and methodologies utilized by *Consumer Reports* to score hospitals on patient safety and quality measures were not validated by CHA or the American Hospital Association (AHA). CHA was not given the opportunity to review the report to verify the methodologies or data used for the rankings.
- *CR's* attempt to provide consumers and patients with more hospital quality information may be misleading. The *CR* report ranks hospitals on just a few quality measures, uses data secured from a variety of sources, and utilizes data covering different reporting periods. This inconsistent and incomplete approach does not ensure a comprehensive, comparable analysis of each hospital's patient safety and quality record.
- *CR* utilized data obtained from The Leapfrog Group (TLG) to evaluate and measure quality outcomes in one category – Infections. Many hospital leaders and quality experts have called into question Leapfrog's data used to evaluate hospital safety. The AHA has criticized the group's data as biased and inaccurate, with a number of shortcomings. CHA, the AHA and other hospital leaders were not given the opportunity to review Leapfrog's full report to verify data and methodologies for hospital ratings.
- Despite using some of TLG's data, the *CR* scorecard shows conflicting "grades" with TLG's hospital safety report produced in June. The disparities among a growing number of hospital quality reports is creating additional confusion, and doing little to advance the goals of safe patient care and better informed consumers.
- *CR's* safety rankings of hospitals were based on data collected from the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) surveys of patients after discharge. This 27-question survey is designed to help hospitals measure communications and the patient experience. It does not measure the quality of clinical care provided.
- California's hospitals already have numerous patient safety and quality improvement initiatives underway to reduce health care-acquired conditions, as well as prevent errors and unplanned hospital readmissions. California's hospitals are working in federally-qualified patient safety organizations (PSOs) and regional patient safety collaboratives to improve patient safety, advance clinical best-practices and improve quality for all patients.
- The increased number of hospital quality reports should give consumers meaningful and useful information with greater transparency. However, most of the scorecards do not provide a complete picture of quality in hospitals. It is important for patients to talk with their own physician and their hospital about these matters when they are making decisions about their care.

- Patient safety and quality are top priorities in California hospitals. Improvements, while substantial, will be more remarkable during the next few months.
- Patients and consumers have access to robust, publicly available hospital quality reports on www.CalHospitalCompare.org and other websites. These online resources provide consumers with more than 91 quality of care indicators.