



JOINT COMMISSION RELEASES PATIENT SATISFACTION DATA

by David Gourley MHA, RRT, FAARC

In January, the Joint Commission announced that hospital patient satisfaction data is available from the Joint Commission's Quality Check Web site (www.qualitycheck.org). This data describes how patients perceive the care they received at a particular hospital.

The patient satisfaction data was obtained from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Hospital Compare Web site. The data was collected by CMS under the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Health Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) initiative. This initiative began in 2002, with the first data collection in October 2006. It was intended to provide a standardized survey instrument and data collection methodology for measuring patient's perspectives on hospital care.

CMS implemented the HCAHPS initiative because there was no national standard for collecting or publicly reporting patient satisfaction data that would enable comparisons between hospitals. HCAHPS is the result of a partnership between CMS and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). In May 2005, the National Quality Forum formally endorsed HCAHPS.

All hospitals and other healthcare organizations have conducted patient satisfaction surveys for many years. The HCAHPS project is meant to complement the patient satisfaction data that is already being collected. There are three major goals of the HCAHPS initiative. First, the survey is designed to produce comparable data on meaningful domains that are important to consumers. Second, public reporting of the data is intended to drive hospitals to improve quality of care. Finally, public reporting will increase the transparency of the quality of hospital care.

The survey is a core set of questions that can be combined with questions customized to the specific health care institution. The patient perception of care items encompass seven key topics: communication with doctors, communication with nurses, responsiveness of hospital staff, cleanliness and quietness of hospital environment, pain management, communication about medicines and discharge information. Also included are four screener questions and five demographic items.

The survey is 27 questions in length. The survey can be administered by telephone, mail, mixed (mail followed by telephone), or interactive voice response. It is performed 48 hours to six weeks after discharge from the hospital to a random sampling of adult patients.

All respiratory therapists must be aware of the impact of patient satisfaction on a hospital's reputation and public image. Today's health care consumer is much more sophisticated than even a decade ago. With the widespread common use of the Internet, much more information about hospitals is available than ever before. With the addition of HCAHPS data on the Joint Commission's Quality Check, the public can easily review the satisfaction of our hospital's patients, in addition to obtaining quality and performance improvement data, and the results of the Joint Commission's last survey.

The expectation of the general public is also higher than in the past. Patients and families are looking not only for high-quality care, but for typical hotel amenities and service. It is anticipated that these expectations will continue to increase as the baby boomer generation increasingly uses the health care system. Each hospital will need to compete for these patients with both quality and service excellence, and every hospital employee plays a critical role in achieving both. We will need to meet or exceed our patients' expectations if we are to survive and thrive in an increasingly difficult health care marketplace.

With the addition of patient satisfaction data to the Quality Check Web site, the Joint Commission is providing a one-stop shop for valuable information about hospitals to the thousands of people who access Quality Check each month. The wealth of information will serve to further educate the knowledgeable health care consumer of today and tomorrow.

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David Gourley will be a featured speaker at the 9th annual Focus Conference May 14-16, 2009 Disney's Coronado Springs Resort Orlando, Florida