

Quotable Facts on Hospital Quality for Hospital Marketers and Public Relations Staff

The upcoming release of the new consumer Web resource, Hospital Compare on www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov, www.medicare.gov, and through 1-800-MEDICARE is likely to generate more publicity for Arizona hospitals. The site is the result of a partnership that involves the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that runs Medicare, hospitals, hospital associations, national accreditors, and consumer groups. You may receive calls from local media about your data and you may well want to get information out to your employees, Board of Directors, volunteers and others in advance of the release. In some cases, since the public data were made available late in 2004 on a provider-focused site, articles have already been written.

In addition to talking with the media about your hospital's data, Medicare's publication of quality data for nearly all of the nation's hospitals is an opportunity to continue your conversation about quality improvement with many constituents, including physicians and staff, the Board of Directors, donors, and with your community.

Talking About Hospital Compare as a Resource

You may want to develop your own facts about how quality information impacts your hospital and the job you do. Here is some information about the Hospital Compare resource, the data on the site, and the Medicare Hospital Quality Initiative that may be helpful:

- The **Hospital Quality Alliance**, a group including the American Hospital Association, the Federation of American Hospitals, the American Association of Medical Colleges—representing the nation's hospitals, collaborated with Medicare, consumer and employer groups, national accreditors and others on the quality measures and development of the Hospital Compare tool.
- Hospitals nationwide have voluntarily submitted quality-of-care information on three common conditions that affect patients: **heart attack, heart failure, and pneumonia**.
- This is the first time national data have been made available directly from Medicare to consumers, and while other hospital quality "scorecards" exist, they measure smaller groups of payers, and often, different measurements of quality.
- The quality measures include appropriate inclusions and exclusions to enable a more scientific-based, "apples to apples" comparison of different hospitals on a national basis.
- **Hospital Compare is a dynamic resource that will be updated periodically** to best meet consumers' needs. In the future, it will include additional quality measures and will also add a patient satisfaction survey section to the Web site.
- Medicare's Hospital Quality Initiative is part of national initiative to improve the quality of care in our nation's nursing homes, home health agencies, and hospitals.

You may also wish to refer more general inquiries on hospital quality to your local Medicare Quality Improvement Organization (QIO), Health Services Advisory Group (HSAG), the Medicare regional office or the state hospital association.

Why tell your quality improvement story?

Quality improvement is a story that the public can understand, so reporters like to tell it. Positive examples of quality improvement efforts can increase the credibility of your hospital. Talking to a reporter about your specific quality improvement efforts demonstrates a patient-centered concern that will be respected by your community.

If you are working with HSAG, or have participated in educational programs offered by us, you may want to tell the reporter about that as a way to demonstrate your serious commitment to quality improvement. As a QIO, we know that ‘stories’ help communicate the message. To the extent that you can put the face of a patient or patients onto your quality improvement story, it will be more appealing, have more impact, and generally gain greater media interest than a story that relies upon data alone.

If you have other examples of quality improvement efforts or systems changes that improved your quality of care, offer those to reporters inquiring about the quality data.

These “success stories” work well when you are reacting to an inquiry or call, or you can approach the media proactively to demonstrate your commitment.

If your performance on the measures is good:

Be sure to tell the media why it is good. If you can tell the media what you are doing to measure and ensure good care, it will show that your institution is committed to providing high quality care to every patient, every time. Let the media know that you are using the data to do an even better job, and talk about your quality improvement efforts, including any work with HSAG.

Use good scores as an opportunity to acknowledge your staff and bolster employee morale.

This approach will support the importance of the Hospital Compare data and quality improvement initiatives and will likely reinforce your hospital’s credibility.

What if your performance on the measures is below average?

Your hospital will gain credibility by acknowledging challenges if you can show that you are changing your systems to correct any problems. If you have recent data that show improvement, share that with the media to let them know that you are making progress. This is an opportune time to demonstrate your organization’s commitment to quality. By getting concrete feedback on your performance, you are now turning that knowledge into action.

You may also wish to point out that you voluntarily reported this information because of your commitment to quality improvement, reminding the media that reporting is not a mandatory exercise.

Demonstrating system improvements and a willingness to use the data to improve care tells the community that you take this information and your responsibilities seriously.

In recent news articles, Duke University Hospital, the VA Hospital System, Austin, Texas' Seton Medical Center, and others took this approach, acknowledging poor performance on one or more measures and describing their efforts to change. As a result, these institutions came away with a positive image, in part because they could show that they were improving.

A reminder about using Hospital Compare or the Medicare brand for marketing purposes

Please be reminded that the quality measures listed on Hospital Compare should not be used in advertising, marketing, public relations materials, or other means of communications, to imply an endorsement by CMS or as a form of rating or ranking by CMS.

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