

Health Care: Quality as the Top Priority

This is part four of a five part series running in the Ukiah Daily Journal about health care issues locally and nationally. Tomorrow's story: "Health Care: An Uncertain Future in our State." You can find the entire series of health care articles on Ukiah Valley Medical Center's website: www.uvmc.org then click the "Publication" link.

When someone walks into a hospital, quality is always at the top of their mind. Patients and families want to know that the hospital they are trusting to provide care is delivering the very best care with the most state-of-the-art equipment available.

In today's health care market, the Internet has opened up an entirely new perspective on how to find out if hospitals are reaching quality benchmarks.

A U.S. hospital oversight and accrediting body, The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), has a site dedicated to consumers who want to check on their healthcare provider. The site, www.qualitycheck.org, is a comprehensive guide to nearly 16,000 Joint Commission-accredited health care organizations and programs throughout the United States.

"More than ever before, Americans are seeking information to help them make sound decisions about their health care," says Dennis S. O'Leary, M.D., president, Joint Commission. "Quality Check is an important new source of quality-related information that will substantially enrich the consumer's knowledge base."

Locally, Ukiah Valley Medical Center (UVMC) is accredited by the JCAHO and is part of the Federal Government's "Hospital Quality Alliance" (HQA) program. The program designates that a hospital has agreed to submit performance measures for publication on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) web site.

To date, over 4,000 hospitals have volunteered to participate, including UVMC.

The National Patient Safety Goals are part of the requirements that the JCAHO expects accredited organizations, like UVMC, to take seriously in order to prevent medical errors such as miscommunication among caregivers, wrong site surgery, and safe medication use.

A panel of national safety experts in collaboration with the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and the American College of Surgeons has determined that taking these simple, proven steps will reduce devastating medical errors.

"We want to give our community every tool possible to show that we are an excellent provider of care and continue to meet national benchmarks," said UVMC Vice President of Patient Care, Carolyn Kozik, RN, MSN.

“We know that patients have an enormous amount of information available at their fingertips. Our goal is to make sure they have accurate and up-to-date information to demonstrate our local, first-rate patient safety scores,” said Kozik.

UVMC recently ranked at the top score for patient satisfaction in a survey by the National Research Corporation (NRC) Picker Group.

UVMC’s Obstetrics department garnered the NRC Best Score for nursing response. Patients were asked to answer the question: ‘How many minutes after pushing the call button did it take for you to get help?’ UVMC received 100% positive feedback.

UVMC’s Outpatient Surgery department also did well, receiving a 92% patient rating of “good to excellent” in the area of physical comfort.

“Excellence has no finish line,” said Kozik. “We are continually looking for ways to improve our quality and patient care. We must look at the entire health care system that a patient goes through, from the first step they take into the hospital to the follow-up care they receive at home.”

According to Kozik, quality patient care must be an ongoing process that the entire team of health care professionals are committed to keeping as their highest priority. “We are working hard to be sure that our community can trust us to provide them the very best care possible right here in Ukiah.”

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