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## **For Your Health's Sake**

### **Why Is “Quality” Healthcare So Important?**

(Huntsville, TX) –“Quality” health care has a wide variety of meanings. To some people, sitting in the waiting room a short time to see a doctor means “quality” health care. To others, being treated politely by the doctor's staff means “quality” health care. There are those who define “quality” health care by how much time the doctor devotes to examining you.

While these are important, "clinical" quality health care is even more important. For instance, if you take your car to a mechanic, the people in the auto shop can be friendly and listen to your complaints but the most important factor is whether or not they fix the problem with your car. Similarly, when you go to a hospital or provider, you want them to fix your problem and help make you better.

There are many ways to measure "clinical" quality health care. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has assembled a range of ways to identify "clinical" quality health care in hospitals. These measures are based on national practices that measure the clinical performances of hospitals by examining data gathered from hospitals.

The quality information presented in this article uses clinical performance measures based on national standards that define “best practices” or “recommended care”. “Best practices” or “recommended care” can be a single activity or a set of processes that have been documented by research and experience to lead to the best outcomes. The measures that we will review can be classified as either **Recommended Care** (also known as Process of Care Measures), **Outcome of Care Measures**, and **Patient Safety Indicators (PSIs)**.

- **Recommended Care (Process of Care) Measures** refer to the actions taken to care for the patient. Using the correct process, such as diagnosing, treating, or educating patients, is likely to lead to better outcomes.

Examples of inpatient recommended care measures are “a heart patient receiving an aspirin within 24 hours before or after arrival at the hospital” and “a heart patient prescribed an aspirin at discharge from the hospital.”

- **Outcome of Care Measures** refers to the results of the specific treatment on a patient's health. An example of an outcome of care measure is "mortality rate", which measures the patient death rate of a particular health condition.

- **Patient Safety Indicators (PSIs)**

**PSIs** are a type of Outcome of Care measure, but since their purpose is for a very specific reason, we list them separately. PSIs were developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to screen for complications or medical errors that patients experience in hospitals but are potentially preventable. PSIs look at the number of occurrences of medical errors and examine those procedures or operations identified by AHRQ as vulnerable to medical errors. There is strong evidence that hospitals can reduce patient injuries by implementing certain actions to prevent the medical error from taking place.

So you might be wondering, "Why do you have so many measures on quality of hospitals?" To get the entire picture of quality care being delivered by a provider, it is important to know the results of both recommended care/process of care and outcome of care measures in addition to other information. Each measure is based on national standards developed by different federal agencies looking at different parts of quality. Data gathered from different sources show different aspects of care and treatment.

Many patients think that doctors make the decisions on where a patient should receive care and therefore it is not important for the patient to look at a hospital's performance and quality metrics. This is not the case at all. Many consumers want a doctor's recommendation on hospitals. Frequently, people collect as much information as possible to make informed decisions. Many people choose doctors according to their doctor's hospital affiliation. A doctor must have privileges at a hospital to admit patients. Your doctor may admit patients to several hospitals. If you decide that you would like to go to a hospital with which your doctor is not affiliated, you may want to ask your doctor for a referral or call the hospital of your choice and ask for a list of doctors. If you are enrolled in a managed care plan, use the information on this website to help review your hospital network. Managed care insurers usually offer several choices of hospitals in an area.

I would encourage everyone to gather information on different hospital's quality metrics and use this information to ask your doctor questions. Be informed. Gather more information, and make informed decisions about which hospital is most appropriate for your health care needs.

At Huntsville Memorial Hospital, we place great emphasis on quality data to help us continuously improve our delivery of care. This data helps our staff to shift their focus to the actual results of delivering care. These measurements help our clinicians identify risks of complications so they we can focus on reducing and preventing future recurrences. Just another example of our team focusing on staying **up to the minute** with the latest technologies and treatment solutions, while still providing you with friendly, **down to earth** service that you've grown to expect from your neighborhood hospital.

Hopefully, now you understand what "quality" healthcare is and why it is such an important factor when selecting your provider. Do you know how Huntsville Memorial Hospital scores on our quality metrics? Tune in next week as we focus on our scores (that I am so proud of) and how you can obtain these quality scores for any other hospital in our area. Stay tuned!

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