



Patient Safety Tips

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Know How to Choose the Best Facility for Your Healthcare Needs

Many hospitals and other healthcare facilities are rated periodically on their ability to deliver healthcare services to their communities. While many of these studies are a good starting point when determining where you should go when you need to use the healthcare system, it is important that you know the facts behind how the ratings were developed. The tips below will help you look more closely at the studies behind the healthcare facility rating systems so you can ensure the facility you choose for your particular procedure or care is the best one for you or your loved one.

Questions You Should Ask About Any Healthcare Rating Study:

How Important is this Rating for What I Need to Have Done?

When you're trying to decide where you should have a procedure, decide whether the ratings you're looking at are related to the procedure you need done. For example: A hospital may have been rated well for treating heart attack patients in an emergency department, but that does not mean the same hospital is also rated well for heart valve replacement. Many measures of healthcare quality are narrowly focused on specific diseases or treatments. You can give greater weight to ratings that are closely related to your specific disease or treatment.

Also consider how closely linked the measures used in the ratings are to an outcome that is important to you. For example, if you are having surgery and are concerned about choosing a hospital that is successful with preventing infections, ratings based on their surgical site infection rate would be more important than patient satisfaction with the hospital's cleanliness.

When viewing statistics on hospital or doctor performance on specific procedures, also consider how many of those procedures they have done. There is evidence that the more procedures a doctor performs, the better their outcomes. You may prefer a doctor who has done 1,000 procedures with five complications to one who has done only 100 procedures with no complications.

How is the Study Funded?

Look into how the study was funded. You want to be sure there are no conflicts of interest in regard to the study. You will want to ensure that the group funding the study has no ties to the hospitals in regard to memberships or profitability of any kind. You can consider information to be more reliable—and less likely to be biased—if the funder has no financial or other interest in the outcome of the ratings.

Where Does the Information Come From? What is the Methodology (Process) Behind the Study?

Data used in hospital ratings can come from many sources, including patient ratings of satisfaction, surveys of hospital officials or doctors and nurses, billing data used in collecting payments, or from review of a sample of medical charts. Data can also be collected or reported by employees of the hospital or by outside researchers. The data sources and who collects the data can both influence the hospital ratings. Give greater weight to ratings that are independent of personal opinions and that are collected by objective researchers.

To look at some healthcare facility studies go to the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority consumer web page at www.patientsafetyauthority.org and click on "Patients and Consumers" then "Links to More Consumer Information." As you scroll down the page there are several healthcare organizations such as the Pennsylvania Healthcare Cost Containment Council (PHC4), that offer comparative studies.