

Greenwich Time

Hospital safety -- our utmost priority

Posted: 09/03/2009 06:00:30 PM EDT

By Frank A. Corvino

We've entered an era of high anxiety in health care, caused in large part by a rancorous national debate that is threatening to take the "care" out of health care reform.

Much of this media-induced discussion focuses on financing, cost-cutting and a reduction in services with the specter of hospital safety looming large because of news reports that suggest the system has insufficient safeguards.

No one wants to go to a hospital that isn't safe. In our business, patient safety and quality care have to be our primary concerns during good economic times and bad, with or without health care reform. There can be no compromising on this issue. We can't compromise quality the way many other industries do during an economic crisis.

More than 75 percent of the state's hospitals take part in a campaign called 5 Million Lives, which is sponsored by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Its goal is to reduce preventable deaths through preventing central line infections, reducing MRSA cases, preventing pressure ulcers and ventilator-associated pneumonia, deploying rapid response teams for early intervention, reducing surgical complications, preventing harm from "high alert" medications and improving medication reconciliation.

As members of the Connecticut Hospital Association, we are committed to monitoring quality and patient safety, and each year we convene a

Patient Safety Summit that brings together national and international experts to discuss the latest developments.

A year ago, we at Greenwich Hospital launched a campaign to become the safest hospital in America. While that might sound like an overly ambitious goal, we're committed to achieving it.

In recent months, we have developed safety teams in every department and unit, with some 200 people dedicated to this cause.

As part of the process, my executive staff and I do weekly walk-arounds throughout the hospital so we can talk to the frontline staff about their safety concerns. When an issue is raised, we track it until it is resolved.

For 2009, we identified four priorities that we believe are fundamental to a safe institution. Two of our priorities are clinical: hand hygiene and the patient discharge process. The others are injury prevention for the staff and creating a safe and secure environment. Each priority has a team to champion the cause, and those people report to the Safest Hospital Committee, which I chair.

The highest levels of hospital management are constantly meeting with the staff to determine what issues are important so we can correct them immediately. We address concerns that are raised by both staff members and visitors.

Because of this commitment to safety, we perform exceptionally well on Medicare's quality indicators and the Joint Commission's standards of safety excellence. These barometers provide us with valuable information about what processes must be changed when mistakes are made.

We recently appointed a chief quality officer, who is

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a physician, and it is his job to ensure we are operating in a safe manner for our patients and staff.

We also began a hotline that lets any employee report a safety issue. Equally important, we strive to create a non-punitive work environment, largely because we are more concerned with correcting mistakes than taking disciplinary action when an error is uncovered.

To us, the equation is a simple one: The more concerns that are reported, the better our safety record will be.

In addition, we have installed the latest technology to ensure a safe environment; the system is recognized nationwide for its ability to eliminate the possibility of errors. As a result, almost 90 percent of all orders -- for medication, tests and procedures - are put into a computer by our physicians. The computer technology has built-in safeguards to prevent an untoward action and provide oversight.

For example, all medication is bar-coded, which allows us to scan the medication, the patient's wristband and the doctor's order to ensure the right drug is being administered to the right person at the right time.

We at Greenwich Hospital are fostering a culture that promotes safety -- and according to an in-house survey that Press Ganey conducted, our employees believe our efforts have been beneficial. Ninety percent of the staff said they would feel safe being treated here as a patient; 98 percent would likely recommend Greenwich Hospital as a safe place; and 99 percent believe our culture encourages patient safety.

Beyond a doubt, the key to excellence in health care is to strive for constant improvement at all levels and in all departments. Be assured, we will never

sacrifice patient safety, and it is more than an idle boast when I say we will be the safest hospital in America.

Frank A. Corvino is the president and CEO of Greenwich Hospital.

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