

December 10, 2002

Marc P. Volavka  
Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council  
225 Market Street  
Suite 400  
Harrisburg, Pa. 17101

Dear Mr. Volavka:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on our 2001 statistics.


Our statistics at the Broad Street Campus appear, on the surface, to be troubling. We have a higher than expected mortality rate in two surgical categories: open cholecystectomy and complicated stomach and intestinal obstructions. The total number of patients in each of these categories was small, and, therefore, even 1 death would appear to be a significant deviation from the expected rate.

Each of these cases was carefully reviewed at three levels in the hospital. Each of these patients was very ill at the time of hospitalization. However, the documentation in the medical records doesn't always reflect the severity of the patient's condition. This is an ongoing problem in our institution. Physicians take care of patients. Paperwork is secondary. Unfortunately, the statistics are derived from what is documented by the physician in the medical record. If you walk down the halls of our hospitals and "eyeball" the patients, they are, indeed, very ill. However, the medical record doesn't always reflect the gravity of the patient's condition.

This lack of documentation is also seen in the length of stay statistics. Our case management department works very hard to ensure that patients receive the care that they need in the appropriate setting. If a patient is sick and needs to stay in the hospital longer than expected, the patient stays. Conversely, if the patient no longer requires acute inpatient services, the patient is discharged either to home or to a more appropriate setting. Each patient's case receives individual attention from our case managers and physician reviewers in order to ensure that our patients receive the best possible care for their conditions. Again, the documentation in the medical record doesn't always reflect severity of the patient's condition, nor the reasons for early discharge or extended stays. This is reflected in our statistics.

We have instituted a number of programs within the Alliance to improve medical record documentation. We expect that future statistics will confirm the excellent quality of care provided by the physicians and hospitals of the Greater Hazleton Health Alliance.

Yours truly,

  
Barbara A. Vilushis, DO  
Associate Medical Director, GHHA