



Windber
Medical Center
Member Conemaugh Health System

December 9, 2002

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

Dear Mr. Volavka:

Windber Medical Center would like to offer formal comments to the 2001 Hospital Performance Report.

Windber Medical Center has had an inpatient Palliative Care Unit since 1981 (in conjunction with the oldest Hospice Program in Pennsylvania, which began in 1977). Inpatient mortality rates can be misleading when these inpatients are grouped with regular acute care inpatients since these terminally ill patients have elected to receive only palliative care.

Mortality rates significantly higher than expected were seen in Windber Medical Center's data for congestive heart failure, DRG 012, DRG 024, and DRG 0172. A detailed analysis of the patients included in these groupings revealed the following:

Congestive Heart Failure --- Of 11 mortalities, 4 patients were in their nineties, 2 were in their eighties, and 5 were in their mid-seventies. Three of these patients were Palliative Care inpatients.

DRG 012 --- There was an extremely small sample size of only 6 inpatients in this DRG, with half of these patients being Palliative Care Inpatients.

DRG 024 --- There were only 12 inpatients included in this DRG and one fourth were Palliative Care Inpatients.

DRG 0172 --- There were only 12 patients included in this DRG and 10 of these patients were Palliative Care Inpatients, accounting for 6 of the 7 mortalities in this category.

Sincerely,

James A. Eckenrode, M.D., M.B.A.
Chief Operating Officer

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