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JAMES W. BARNER
PRESIDENT/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

October 15, 2003

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

Dear Mr. Volavka:

The Altoona Hospital welcomes the opportunity to comment on the statistical results from the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council's Hospital Performance Report.

To begin, we would like to assure you and the public that all cases of patient mortality at Altoona Hospital are thoroughly reviewed by Peer Review Committees of Physicians for any deficiencies. Furthermore, the cases of mortality contained in the latest Hospital Performance Report received additional review and were found to be acceptable given the patients' conditions and our requirements for meeting the standards of care.

Given that information and context, it is our pleasure to respond more specifically to the DRG's where you statistically identified that mortality was higher than anticipated. Within these three DRG's, (DRG 012-Degenerative Neurologic Disorders, DRG 180-Stomach & Intestinal Obstruction, Complicated, and DRG 410 - Chemotherapy except for Acute Leukemia) a total of nine patients died. All of these patients were very elderly with the exception of one who had extensive metastatic cancer. All the patients presented to Altoona Hospital with severe chronic diseases, as well as in critical and unstable conditions. In all cases, extensive and heroic actions were taken to prolong these lives prior to defining the exact wishes of the patient and/or their families. In many cases, the living wills and other advanced directives for these patients directed that no heroic measures were to be undertaken under any circumstance to prolong their lives. The average age for those that died was 82 years (excluding the 40 year-old cancer patient that had endured a long battle with the disease). In general, all nine of these patients were very sick with multiple co-morbid conditions.

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The Altoona Hospital welcomes the opportunity to respond to your review and appreciates the data you have been able to provide. We will use this data as yet another opportunity for us to improve and strengthen our ability to provide high quality, cost-efficient care.

Sincerely,



R. Scott Magley, MD
Senior Vice-President
Chair, Department of Emergency Medicine



Michael-Gerard Moncman, DO
President, Medical Staff

cc: James W. Barner, President and Chief Executive Officer