

Hospital Quality Assurance

All good hospitals are continuously seeking effective ways to improve the quality of care for their patients. This can be achieved through a combination of obtaining the best results for each patient, preventing any complications that are due to human error and providing comprehensive care and focus to every patient. To be truly successful, all of this needs to be accomplished in a cost effective way and every step of the process should be documented.

Hospital quality assurance is not meant to be a process that inserts an outside authority that will hinder the decision-making capabilities of either administrators or physicians. Neither is it intended to take the time and attention away from any health care staff member's primary responsibility of healing and caring for patients in the facility.

There are a number of categories that comprise quality assurance in a hospital setting. These include:

- Earning and maintaining accreditation through a medical governing organization such as the Joint Commission.
- Performing regular clinical audits, which focus on the collection of data having to do with compliance with quality standards that have been put into place. These reports provide information on performance and fulfillment of these standards as well as assess patient outcomes.
- Conducting mortality and morbidity reviews, which are structured examinations of cases that resulted in an illness or the death of a patient. These reviews are designed to help healthcare professionals gain a greater understanding of problems that occur in order to improve the overall quality of care moving forward.
- Employing a system that measures patient safety indicators. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services, provides a software program designed to help administrators understand safety issues and areas of vulnerability within their hospitals. When patient data is input into a patient safety indicator, the program can identify preventable mistakes and departures from safe care measures taking place.
- Requiring Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits be obtained by health care professionals on staff. The most committed of professionals recognize the importance of continually learning about the latest practices and advances in their field of medicine.
- Following infection protocols. Healthcare-associated infections are the most common complication for hospital patients. In the United States alone, they are the cause of 1.7 million infections and nearly 100,000 deaths annually. Practices should be adopted in every hospital to address the health care staff's habits including impeccable hand hygiene and other infection safety standards that aid in preventing patient infections.

- Observing external quality controls designed and implemented to assess performance and determine just how well the patient safety system is working within the hospital.
- Emphasizing ethics in all work practices. Hospital ethics committees and training programs can provide advice and assistance to all healthcare personnel on legal responsibilities as well as ethical concerns and decision making in the hospital setting.

What Patients Can Do

In any healthcare situation, but especially when admitted as a patient to a hospital, people can also help the process along and ensure the likelihood of their own safety. Some of the most important ways patients can protect themselves are:

- Checking that your admittance wristband contains all correct information.
- Ask questions about the care you are receiving or the procedure you will be undergoing. Take notes and bring along a friend or relative if you are concerned that you might not understand everything fully.
- Request complete disclosure about any surgical procedure recommended, including potential risks and complications.
- Inform all of your healthcare providers about medications you are taking as well as allergies you have.
- Determine the best course of treatment by getting a second opinion.
- Maintain your own copy of your health history to ensure accuracy.

Quality is a vitally important factor in health care. Since some facilities raise the bar to a much higher level of quality than others, it always pays to do some research and check on any hospital in which you are considering having a procedure done. For your own well-being, it is just as essential to give thorough consideration to the facility where any procedure will be performed as it is to make an informed choice when selecting a doctor. In this case, there is much you can learn about a hospital or other medical facility by going over report cards that are issued by both government and consumer groups.