

GOVERNMENT HEALTH IT

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Combining satisfaction and healthcare cost data

By *Erin McCann, Contributing Editor*

An organization in Virginia has made the most of available federal data and has provided a one-stop-shop for healthcare consumers.

Virginia Health Information, which charges itself with making health data available for effective consumer decision making, released statewide patient satisfaction ratings -- based on CMS data released this year -- last month, and just this June followed it up with outpatient procedural pricing data, also from CMS.

"Consumers want general information on why a procedure is needed, how it is performed, the risks, benefits, alternatives and recovery time," said Michael Lundberg, executive director of VHI, in a press statement. "VHI couples the background information with specific lists of where the procedure is performed, how often and the pre-discounted charges."

Looking at the now public data, for example, a diagnostic colonoscopy at Virginia medical facilities could cost patients anywhere from \$625 -- at physician offices -- to \$11,041 at various hospitals. LewisGale Hospital in Pulaski charges the highest rates for a diagnostic colonoscopy at \$11,041, having 440 total cases in 2012.

Contrastingly, Virginia Hospital Center, one of the state's top ranked hospitals and one with the highest patient recommendation rates, according to VHI, charges \$2,873 per diagnostic colonoscopy, having some 3,700 cases in 2012.

Looking to save money? To get the same procedure done at Gastroenterology Association of No. Virginia cost patients a much more affordable \$625, with the group performing 865 colonoscopies in 2012.

As far as patient satisfaction ratings go, there also exists a huge range, data suggests. Overall, patients in Virginia are slightly less satisfied with their hospitals (69 percent would recommend hospitals) compared with the national average of 71 percent.

Virginia hospitals garnering the most positive patient recommendations included Virginia Hospital Center -- 86 percent of patients would recommend this hospital; Sentara Prince Anne Hospital at 84 percent; and Martha Jefferson Hospital and Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center, both at 82 percent.

The hospitals receiving the lowest scores included the Emporia, Va.-based Southern Virginia Regional Medical Center and Danville Regional Medical Center, with a paltry 48 percent of

patients recommending the hospital. Memorial Hospital of Martinsville & Henry County also received low marks.

After CMS released more outpatient/inpatient data this June, several hospitals have gotten on board with making the information easily available to the public.

"The release of these data sets furthers the administration's efforts to increase transparency and support data-driven decision making which is essential for healthcare transformation," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, in a June 2 press statement.

Just in April, the Atlanta-based Piedmont Healthcare became one of the first provider groups in the country to post independent patient reviews of their docs online, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. Already, some 210 of Piedmont physicians have their ratings listed on the website, all in a trend toward healthcare transparency.

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