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MWH APPROVAL LAGGING

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BY JIM HALL

Less than 60 percent of patients at Mary Washington Hospital would recommend it to family and friends, a performance that lags most other hospitals in the state and nation, according to a newly released federal survey.

The 410-bed Fredericksburg hospital recorded below-average scores in 10 patient-satisfaction areas on a survey by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The national survey is one of the few that focuses on what patients say about their hospital experiences. The results have been published annually since 2008.

The latest findings are available on the Hospital Compare website operated by CMS and the Virginia Health Information website. VHI is a nonprofit agency that collects state health data.

Among the questions that surveyors asked patients:

Was your hospital room clean and quiet?

Did someone respond quickly when you pushed the call button or when you needed to go to the bathroom?

Was your pain well controlled?

Did doctors and nurses communicate well with you?

Mary Washington scored below the Virginia and national averages in all 10 areas.

Potomac Hospital in Woodbridge scored below average in seven of the areas. Culpeper Regional Hospital was below average in eight areas.

Fauquier Hospital in Warrenton turned in the best performance of any area hospital. It matched or beat the state and national averages in 9 of 10 areas.

Stafford Hospital and the Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center are too new to have been included in the survey.

At Mary Washington, 59 percent of respondents answered, "Yes, definitely" when asked if they would
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recommend Mary Washington to family and friends.

Yet, most other hospitals scored better. Statewide, the average was 66 percent, and nationally the average was 68 percent.

Mary Washington's overall rating, as judged by patients, also was below the state and national averages.

A hospital official said yesterday that the survey results are disappointing.

"Our goal is to provide high-quality care, and we're not pleased with where we are with patient satisfaction," said Kathleen Allenbaugh, hospital spokeswoman. "We are working diligently to make improvements."

Allenbaugh said the hospital has taken several steps in recent months to improve patients' stays.

It hired a new company to supply hospitalist services. That company starts work this month.

Mary Washington also has been studying other hospitals to see if their "best practices" can be adopted.

"We try to learn from the successes of others," Allenbaugh said.

The CMS survey covered the period October 2008 through September 2009. The agency queried at least 300 Mary Washington patients.

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The CMS' Hospital Compare website address is hospitalcompare.hhs.gov/.

Virginia Health Information has the same patient-satisfaction information at vhi.org.

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