



Choose the Right Hospital

A TOOLKIT TO FACILITATE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



What Is Quality?

As a first step in helping employees understand why quality care is such a critical factor to consider when looking for a hospital, it is important to define “good quality care.” Although there are many varying definitions, perhaps the best description is “doing the right thing — at the right time — in the right way — with the best possible results.”¹

Doing the Right Thing ...

The “right thing” means doing what is helpful and avoiding what is not based on the best research. This is often referred to as the “process” of care. In most cases, the best care is based on clinical guidelines that are generally developed by specialty groups (such as surgeons, cardiologists and oncologists), usually with the input of many others. The best guidelines evaluate clinical evidence and are updated routinely. Although most guidelines refer to medical and surgical treatment, there are guidelines for other aspects of care, such as preventing infection and managing pain. Medical practice also must respect patient preferences, even if they are not in line with guidelines (for example, deciding not to have an intervention that is recommended).

At the Right Time ...

At the “right time” means no harmful delays. It refers to patients having access to needed care in a timely manner. The right time can refer to a physician’s judgment about whether a delay could be harmful to a patient’s health or result in death.

In the Right Way...

Even when the correct treatment is chosen, sometimes there are errors in carrying it out. The Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) report, *To Err is Human*, points out the frequency of errors in hospital care, some of which result in patient harm. The report also stressed that, in most cases, adverse events do not occur because of lack of knowledge, effort or good will. Rather, far more often, they occur when hospitals do not have reliable systems and training in place to prevent accidents, reduce harm and minimize the chance of similar events taking place again. Many hospitals are working on this weakness by applying safety and training practices that have been learned in other industries to their hospital to ensure that employees and consumers are not hurt.

With the Best Possible Results...

Usually the best possible results refer to surviving or having a good outcome from surgery or hospitalization. These types of outcomes include avoiding complications, injuries or readmission to the hospital. Hospital Compare includes the results of a hospital patient survey called the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Hospitals and Provider Systems (HCAHPS), which reports what patients have said about getting care promptly, communicating with health professionals and getting information when it is needed. For employers and employees, there are other important outcomes, including effects on employee productivity, health status and reduced leave due to health problems. At this time, however, there is no national survey that assesses how hospital quality impacts these factors.

¹ This definition is a shorthand version of a more formal one developed by the IOM. That definition states that, “Quality of care is the degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired outcomes and are consistent with current professional practices.” (IOM. Medicare. A Strategy for Quality Assurance. 1990. Washington DC: National Academy Press.)