WHA Report Shows Hospital Quality Improvements Reduce Cost, Improve Care, Increase Value

Wisconsin hospitals provided better care to 9,000 patients, avoided more than $87 million in health care costs

MADISON (February 10, 2015) --- Wisconsin hospitals’ efforts to improve quality are reducing health care costs in the state, improving patient care and saving lives.

That is according to a new report http://www.wha.org/pdf/WHA2014QualityReport.pdf from the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) that documents the progress hospitals made in 2014 to reduce avoidable hospital readmissions, decrease infections and prevent medication errors.

The 108 hospitals working with WHA over the past three years estimate that they have improved care for over 9,000 patients and avoided more than $87 million in health care costs in Wisconsin. Those results do not reflect the results of 32 additional hospitals in Wisconsin that are working with other improvement groups.

“Wisconsin hospitals are demonstrating measurable and sustained progress toward improving care by adopting best practices, sharing what they have learned, and working in teams,” according to WHA Chief Quality Officer Kelly Court. “We still have work to do, but we have the improvement processes, determination and support to move us closer.”

One area that is particularly important to patients is the prevention of hospital-acquired infections. Central line-associated blood stream infections (CLABSI) are among the most serious and often lead to extended stays in the Intensive Care Unit or place a patient at risk of death. Since 2008, Wisconsin hospitals have reduced CLABSI by 71 percent by standardizing best practices and with real-time monitoring.

Another infection that is more common, catheter-associated urinary tract infections (CAUTI), has also been a focus for improvement activities. The key to reducing CAUTI is adherence to best practices for catheter insertion, as well as early identification of when a catheter is no longer needed, according to Court. Hospitals have driven down CAUTI by 20 percent statewide. Court said work will continue in 2015 to bring CAUTI rates even lower.

Preventing patients from returning to the hospital after discharge has been a special area of emphasis. About eight percent of Wisconsin patients are readmitted for further treatment of their original condition, or as a result of a complication or a new problem. The reasons for a readmission vary greatly, and it is one of the hardest outcomes for hospitals to improve.
The complexity of the issue requires strong partnerships with patients, and with other health-related organizations in the community. These partners include nursing homes, home health and public agencies that provide services to patients who are elderly or disabled.

For the past three years, WHA has worked with state leaders from a variety of organizations that have a stake in reducing readmissions. Together, this group helped to launch 22 community coalitions across the state. These coalitions can be as small as one hospital, to regions with three or four hospitals and many other health care providers in the same community. All are focused on working together to provide patients and their families the support they need when patients are transitioned to a new care setting or back to their homes.

Hospitals are also working to reduce adverse drug events. Any mistake with a medication has the potential to cause harm; however, a special group of medications used in hospitals are more likely to cause harm if there is a dosing error, and the harm they cause is more likely to be serious. WHA is partnering with the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin (PSW) to help hospitals improve processes for administering these medications, including accurately calibrating doses and carefully monitoring and evaluating the patient’s condition after he or she receives the medication. Hospitals working on this initiative have seen a 43 percent reduction in adverse drug events related to insulin and anticoagulants.

WHA President/CEO Eric Borgerding said the Association is committed to helping hospitals and health systems expand and accelerate their quality improvement work with education and on-site support.

“Hospitals have made a lot of headway, but there is still a long road ahead to meet, and then exceed, the high standards of care that are a hallmark in Wisconsin,” according to Borgerding. “Our work with our member hospitals will continue to include cultivating community partnerships to ensure smooth transitions among various health care settings, engaging patients and families in their care, and publicly reporting key quality measures and pricing information. Our goal is to always be recognized as one of the best states in the nation based on the quality of our health care.”

As hospitals improve the quality of care, patient outcomes are better, and unnecessary costs to patients and purchasers of health care services are reduced.

“High-quality, high-value health care is what sets Wisconsin apart from other states,” Borgerding said. “Hospitals and health systems will continue to pursue clinical excellence, guided by the dedicated and caring health care professionals and support staff who put patients first.”

Wisconsin is already a national leader in health care transparency, including publicly reporting both quality results (WiCheckPoint.org) and price information (WiPricePoint.org). Hospitals have embraced transparency and know how to leverage this type of reporting to drive improvement in their organizations.

WiCheckPoint.org is a source for information on infections, birth information, heart and stroke-related care, mortality, patient satisfaction and many other topics. Today, 127 hospitals report 80 hospital quality measures on the site. The website averages 3,000 visits each month.