10 Facts
About Hospital Quality

1. Approximately 17 percent of Medicare patients who are admitted to the hospital each year are readmitted within 30 days of discharge, with up to 90 percent of these readmissions estimated to be unplanned and unnecessary.[1,2] This not only adversely affects the patients' health, but also results in $12–17 billion in additional Medicare spending.[3]

2. Research suggests that financial incentives can induce changes in quality, and that readmissions can be reduced.[4] In October 2012, hospitals face a penalty equal to 1 percent of their total Medicare billings if an excessive number of patients are unnecessarily readmitted. The penalty rises to 2 percent beginning October 2013 and 3 percent in 2014.[5]

3. One in five people in the U.S. speaks a language other than English at home. Of these, nearly 25 million individuals report speaking it "less than very well,"[6] posing extreme challenges in communicating with hospital staff, understanding medical diagnoses and accurately following discharge instructions.[7]

4. Evidence shows that patients with limited English proficiency have greater difficulty obtaining care, get less primary care,[8] receive fewer preventive services[9] and are less satisfied with their care.[10]

5. Patients who speak limited English but who are provided with an interpreter make more outpatient visits, fill more prescriptions, and have higher satisfaction with care.[11,12] Thus, the ability to communicate with a health care provider can mean the difference between receiving higher- or lower-quality care.

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Annual visits to emergency departments (EDs) in the United States increased between 1997 and 2012,[13] while the total number of EDs decreased by 27 percent between 1990 and 2009.[14]

7

Many EDs are overwhelmed by the number of patients needing their services, with 62 percent of the nation's EDs reporting that they are "at" or "over" operating capacity.[15]

8

As the health care professionals who are most frequently at patients' bedsides, nurses play a central role in ensuring the quality of hospital care that patients receive, and their vigilance is an important defense against medical errors. But when they are overburdened with nonclinical demands and system inefficiencies and failures, patient care suffers and disillusioned nurses often leave their jobs.[16]

9

A significant challenge to providing high-quality, patient-centered care is the high turnover of nursing staff. The national average for nursing turnover in U.S. hospitals ranges from about 8 percent to 14 percent per year,[17,18] and the rate for nurses on medical/surgical units may be even higher.

10

Research has shown that 70 to 90 percent of errors in hospitals result from badly designed systems of care.[19] Close to 40 percent of all unanticipated hospital deaths occur on medical/surgical units.[20]

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