

St. Albans

Friday, June 12, 2009

MESSENGER

75 cents

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NMC gets high marks on report card

Quality-of-care data available to public

By Messenger Staff

ST. ALBANS — The Northwestern Medical Center (NMC) ranks well above the national average for quality of care procedures in each of four key indicators contained in the 2009 Hospital Report Card Comparison.

A review of the new data also shows that the NMC met or exceeded state performance averages. Also, in all but one case the local hospital scored higher in its composite scores than three other hospitals located in northern

Vermont. [See accompanying chart.]

The just released report features quality of care, pricing and financial data for Vermont hospitals. Complete data for all hospitals has been posted on the Web site of Vermont's Department of Banking, Insurance Securities and Health Care Administration (BISHCA), and can be accessed through the "Hospital Report Card" link on NMC's Web site.

Commissioner of BISHCA Paulette Thabault, in a press release announcing

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Listed here are the "composite scores" for the VT Hospitals located in and around the northwestern corner of the State. The composite score shows what percentage of patients received all of the necessary procedures.

Hospital	Heart Attack Care	Heart Failure Care	Pneumonia Care	Preventing Complications from Surgery
National Average	91%	82%	82%	80%
State Average	95%	85%	83%	86%
Northwestern Medical Center	95%	100%	94%	91%
Copley Hospital	86%	84%	72%	70%
North Country Hospital	88%	95%	83%	79%
Fletcher Allen Health Care	96%	91%	74%	87%

Source: Vermont Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities & Health Care Administration, "Hospital Report Cards."

Here is an explanation for each of the composite score categories listed above:

► **Heart Attack Care:** A heart attack happens when arteries leading to the heart become blocked and the blood supply is slower or stopped. Seven criteria considered, including: aspirin at arrival; aspirin at discharge; beta block-

er at discharge, smoking cessation counseling; and other medical procedures.

► **Heart Failure Care:** Heart failure is a weakening of the heart's pumping power. With heart failure, the body doesn't get enough oxygen and nutrients to meet its needs. Four criteria considered: smoking cessation counseling, discharge

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ing the scores, said, "Putting these hospital report card measures on public view creates transparency for Vermont consumers who can now weigh this information, along with other important factors, when choosing hospital services."

It is Thabault's belief that posting the data also results in better patient care and experiences for Vermonters. She said, "Hospitals look at the comparative scores and ask, 'How can we improve this measurement?' They sharpen their focus on the issues, commit resources, and the improvements follow."

The quality-of-care data included as part of the Hospital Report Card is based on the Core Measures, as established by the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Core Measures track a variety of evidence-based, scientifically researched standards of care that have been shown to result in improved clinical outcomes for patients. CMS established the Core Measures in 2000 and began publicly reporting data relating to the Core Measures in 2003.

In a statement issued by the NMC, Jane Catton, the hospital's chief quality officer and director of Process Improvement, said NMC has embraced Core Measures and the public reporting of them.

"We have really made this a strategic focus," she said. "Everyone is talking about this and involved in it: the staff, managers, physicians, the Board of Directors. Having the data always at the forefront

keeps it in focus."

Sandy Robinson, NMC's Chief Nursing Officer & Director of Clinical Services, agreed. Also quoted in a statement issued for publication, she said, "The core measures are the widely accepted standard of care. We have worked hard for a number of years to incorporate them in our everyday work. The expectation has to be that we follow the standard every single patient, every single time. We continually refine our systems, and the work is never done."

The publication of the hospital report card data arose from 2003 legislation known as Act 53, a bill covering a range of health care facilities planning and regulation.

NMC has recognized that the data reported through the annual report card process is already somewhat dated when it is published, said a hospital spokesperson. Therefore, said a hos-

pital spokesperson, the hospital has proactively added a "Quality Updates" section to its Web site to allow for even greater transparency in reporting more current data.

NMC's Catton fully expects to see more data about more conditions to be reported publicly in the coming years. But, she said she welcomes the opportunity to help educate the community about the care provided at the hospital.

"I'm confident that what we're doing for our patients is always the right thing. We've made huge gains, and this is a commitment they can expect from us. We try our very best to provide the best possible care, and these results are evidence of that work," said Catton.

To see the NMC's results and for a link to BISHCA's statewide information visit the hospital's Web site (www.northwesternmedicalcenter.org).

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instructions; various medical procedures.

► **Pneumonia Care:** Pneumonia is a serious lung infection that causes difficulty breathing, fever, cough and fatigue. Six criteria considered: antibiotics given within six hours, blood cultures prior to antibiotics, appropriate antibiotics, pneumococcal vaccination, influenza vaccination, and smoking cessation counseling.

► **Preventing Complications from Surgery:** Blood clots in the veins and infections are two potential complications from surgery. Hospitals can reduce risk of wound infection by making sure patients get the right medicines at right times and can reduce the risk of blood clots by ensuring patients receive preventive treatments. Seven criteria considered, including: prophylactic (preventative) antibiotic received within one hour before surgery, prophylactic antibiotic selection, antibiotic discontinued within 24 hours after surgery, appropriate hair removal and various other medical procedures.