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HEALTH CARE

Which hospitals do patients rate best, worst in Central Texas?

First-ever patient rankings of hospitals around the country now available online.

By **Mary Ann Roser**
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

For the first time, consumers can see how their neighbors rated the care, cleanliness and other conditions at their community hospitals, including the amount of noise at night and speed with which staff members responded when patients rang for a bed pan.

More than 1 million adult patients at 2,521 hospitals across the United States participated in the satisfaction survey conducted from October 2006 to June 2007 by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said Kerry Weems, the agency's acting administrator.

The ratings jolted some Central Texas hospital officials, who said they are using them as road maps to drive changes.

"We were not happy with the results, particularly with Seton Medical Center," said Travis Froehlich, vice president for planning at the Seton Family of Hospitals. Froehlich said Seton Medical Center had construction going on during the survey period — the hospital scored particularly low on cleanliness and noise at night — and added that Seton is taking steps to improve. More recent survey results that haven't been posted show that those steps are working, he said.

Patients were asked to rate the explanations they received about their medications, the cleanliness of their rooms and their communications with doctors and nurses, among other things.

Among 11 Central Texas hospitals where randomly selected patients participated in the survey, Seton Medical Center on West 38th Street in Austin and St. David's South Austin Hospital on Ben White Boulevard fared the worst, falling below state and national averages on all 10 indicators of patient satisfaction, according to the survey.

Heart Hospital of Austin scored above state and national averages on all indicators. The scores of Seton Southwest Hospital and St. David's Round Rock Medical Center were next best.

The new data are seen as a way to "drive the quality of health care up, drive costs down and give consumers a choice," Weems said.

In a teleconference with reporters, Weems said his agency is spending \$1.9 million on ads in 58 major daily newspapers across the country starting today to let the public know that the patient satisfaction surveys are on its Web site. The results went up quietly March 28, joining a growing list of comparison data on the site that includes hospitals' heart attack death rates, percentage of patients correctly receiving antibiotics an hour before surgery, and other treatment data. New data will be posted in July, Weems said.

Hospital officials applauded the survey data and said they have been doing their own satisfaction surveys for decades.

"This is the best try at comparing apples to apples," said Sheryl Pfluger, vice president for business development at the Heart Hospital. "We were very pleased with the patient response. Certainly, it will always highlight areas for improvement."

Increasingly, patients are making comparisons when they shop, even for hospitals, Pfluger said.

Initially, hospitals volunteered to take part in the surveys, but participation has been required since July, said Deirdre Mylod, vice president of public policy at Press Ganey, a health care quality improvement company that many hospitals hired to assist with the surveys.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid have a proposal before Congress for a pay-for-performance plan in which hospitals would be reimbursed for care based on how well they perform on satisfaction surveys and other treatment indicators, Mylod said.

David Thomsen, vice president of quality for St. David's HealthCare, said South Austin Hospital undertook a customer service initiative, and he predicted that the hospital would show dramatic

improvement when the next results come out.

Dr. Steve Berkowitz, chief medical officer for St. David's HealthCare, said he won't be satisfied until all of the St. David's hospitals reach the top 10 percent on all measures.

"We're setting benchmarks," he said. "It's exciting. It's a whole new playing field."

Central Texas Medical Center in San Marcos outscored Seton Medical Center and South Austin on almost all of the indicators — until patients were asked how they would rate the hospital overall or recommend it to a friend or family member. In both cases, Central Texas Medical Center fell short.

"It doesn't add up," Central Texas Medical Center spokesman Clay DeStefano said. "We just don't know why."

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On the Web

To look up patient ratings and treatment data on local hospitals and make comparisons, go to <http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov/Hospital>. At the site, click on Begin Search in either box. Then choose whether you want to search by city, county or hospital. You will also need to choose the state. When you click on Texas, you will notice the state is divided in half, with Central Texas under Eastern and Southern. You can select three hospitals at a time to compare. Scroll all the way to the bottom of the page for the patient ratings. They are under a heading called: Survey of Patients' Hospital Experiences.

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Ara wrote:

I agree with Acadia1, I took my husband to Brackenridge ER because of severe vomiting and diarrhea, we stayed in the waiting room for 2.5 hours and never received any type of treatment, so we left, they didn't even check his temperature of blood pressure, they just took our insurance info, address and SSN as soon as we walked in the room. The next day we went to Round Rock medical center and he was treated. We received tons of bills with late fees charges, threatening letters and phone calls from collection agencies and the hospital, we explained the situation a thousand times and sent the info form RRMC but the hassle wouldn't stop for over a year until we got a lawyer and the BBB involved.

5/22/2008 9:10 AM CDT

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Acadia1 wrote:

My one and only experience with Seton on 38th was mixed. As a patient, it was fine, however the billing department leaves something to be desired. I have never, to this day & after multiple requests, received a bill or statement from them, yet a month after my surgery I was receiving calls and notices from a collection agency, and within 6 months from an attorney threatening garnishment. With mutple options in central Texas, I wouldn't use them again for that alone.

5/21/2008 4:55 PM CDT

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Phantom7 wrote:

Just a quick note to say that I was born, grew up in, and still have family in the greater Houston area. I have had the experience of being a patient in some of the Houston/Conroe area hospitals and must say it depends on which facility you receive care from (as I am sure it goes w/o saying here).

I am glad Keymo's experiences have been good ones. When my dad had cancer, he received great care as well from a Houston hospital. But after my Mom's experiences w/a couple hospitals (one in Conroe and one in Williamson County) before admitting her to Austin's Seton Medical Center, she had not received the care she needed.

5/21/2008 2:21 PM CDT

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Joe wrote:

I think Bridget puts everything in perspective.. The hospital is not a "hotel", nurses are not there like stewardesses in a plane to cater to your needs. Patients, don't want to be in the hospital just like their relatives waiting for the next results to come in.

For those of you that are looking for good patient care, expect someone like Bridget to help you.. not a maid to cater to fluff your pillow.. that comes later!!!

Thanks Bridgett for telling us the truth.. though some may not accept it.. Some hospitals just don't cut it.. I'd rather get good treatment than have a fluffed pillow.. I'd rather be catered at home than in a hospital.. the hospital is for treatment of my ails...!! The fixing part is up to the administrators.. they can hire more stewardesses to do the minor stuff. Nurses are trained for what they do.. they are not "maids"..

5/21/2008 1:12 PM CDT

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Keymo wrote:

Some time ago my wife had to address some pretty serious heart failure. Plain, unbiased research of facts led us eventually to seek treatment in Houston even though it involved a protracted, and ultimately expensive battle with insurance. More recently we arrived at the same conclusions for her for cancer treatment. Comparing her brief treatment in Austin, and other family and friend's treatment, I have to say the difference in quality of facilities and employees is night and day. I'm sorry but that's the way I see it. I realize the economies and pay scales are different and that probably accounts for the difference a great deal. But I have to say, that part of the failure comes from the same laid-back, free-spirited attitude I usually love about Austin. It just doesn't play as well in a Hospital setting. I had more than a few encounters with the "Bridget" attitude in Austin. I hope she's not working on saving my life while she's also nursing a grudge against a "demanding" patient.

5/21/2008 12:15 PM CDT

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