AHRQ Scorecard Shows Safety Improvements

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality National Scorecard on Rates of Hospital-Acquired Conditions estimates a 21% decline in hospital-acquired conditions (HACs) from 2010 to 2015. HACs include adverse drug events, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, central line-associated bloodstream infections, pressure ulcers and surgical site infections, among others.

A cumulative total of 3.1 million fewer HACs were experienced by hospital patients over five years, relative to the number of HACs that would have occurred if rates had remained steady at the 2010 level. AHRQ estimates that nearly 125,000 fewer patients died in the hospital as a result of HACs and that about $28 billion in health care costs were saved from 2010 to 2015 due to HAC reductions.

Although the precise causes of the decline in patient harm are not fully understood, the increase in safety has occurred during a period of concerted attention by hospitals throughout the country to reduce adverse events. This effort has been spurred in part by Medicare payment incentives and catalyzed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ (HHS) Partnership for Patients (PfP) initiative, a public-private partnership that was launched in 2011 through the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation to target a specific set of HACs for reductions through systematic quality improvement.

In addition to the PfP, “many organizations supported this progress toward a safer health care system,” according to Dr. Andy Bindman, AHRQ director. Some examples include

- Hospital leaders prioritizing HAC reduction
- Front-line clinicians learning how to apply patient safety knowledge through tools developed by AHRQ and others
- Payment policies by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and other payers, creating financial incentives for improvement
- Public reporting, making hospital performance transparent
- Technical assistance by CMS’s Quality Improvement Organization program and HHS’s PfP
- Electronic health record systems, enabling easier access to data

The safety improvements “demonstrate the commitment across many public and private organizations and front-line clinicians to improve the quality of care received by patients across the country,” Dr. Patrick Conway, deputy administrator for innovation and quality and chief medical officer at CMS, said in a press statement. “It is important to remember that numbers like 125,000 lives saved or over 3 million infections and adverse events avoided represent real value for people across the nation who received high-quality care and were protected from suffering a terrible outcome. It is a testament to what can be accomplished when people commit to working towards a common goal.”