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Treasure Valley hospitals beat U.S. average for safety

Medicare records newly released show average or below-average number of injuries at Idaho facilities.

Medicare patients checking into one of 14 hospitals around the state may be relieved to hear that their medical providers are not likely to leave foreign objects inside them after surgery, mess up blood transfusions, or allow them to get extreme bed sores.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released new data this week showing how many serious conditions Medicare patients suffered while being treated at 4,700 hospitals around the country between October 2008 and June 2010. The conditions often arise from improper procedures, and data show that up to 98,000 people die in hospitals each year from preventable medical errors, CMS said.

“Any potentially preventable complication of care is unacceptable,” Donald Berwick, the agency’s administrator, said in a news release. He added that CMS wants to bring hospital-acquired conditions to light and “eliminate harm from the very health care system intended to heal us.”

The national average was about 1.9 incidents for every 10,000 patients. St. Luke’s in Boise averaged about 1.7, Saint Al’s about 0.4, and Saint Al’s Nampa about 1.1. West Valley Medical Center averaged zero, although it had only 2,051 eligible patient visits in the report.

All hospitals in Idaho reported zero cases of some of the serious injuries that Medicare tracks.

Those accidents that did happen, however, are expensive for hospitals. Medicare treats them as the hospital’s fault, basically, refusing since 2008 to reimburse hospitals for the costs of fixing those conditions, which can range from about \$25,000 to \$66,000 per case.

The most common problems in Idaho — and the United States — are falls and traumas. Those can happen when a patient tries to get out of bed without help from a hospital caregiver. Both of Boise’s main hospitals have created protocols for making sure falls are less common. “Our ultimate goal is obviously to have zero of these incidents,” said Ken Dey, spokesman for St. Luke’s Health System.

St. Luke’s has been monitoring its fall numbers and “so, obviously, we’re not pleased that they’ve crept up a little bit,” Dey said, but is taking actions to reduce them, such as hiring a chief quality officer. Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center has put in place standards to reduce infections related to surgery, including a higher-than-average use of preventive antibiotics.