Complex Infection Data Confusing for Consumers

According to a study published in *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology,* patients often find it difficult to decipher complex numeric data on healthcare-associated infections used by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

While healthcare organisations have made an effort to involve individuals and enable them to take a more active role in their care, the data on healthcare-acquired infections can be fairly complicated and confusing for consumers who want to take informed decisions about their healthcare.

The Affordable Care Act has placed emphasis on the collection and publication of hospital-acquired infection (HAI) data in an effort to improve care and helping consumers make informed choices. Consumers can access this data via the CMS Hospital Compare website.

A survey was conducted by researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine with 110 randomly selected patients at the University of Maryland Medical Center. Participants were asked to compare the frequency of catheter-associated urinary tract infections for two hypothetical hospitals. The data was displayed in the same form that is used on the CMS Hospital Compare.

Three in 10 participants (28 percent) were unable to accurately identify which hospital was better in terms of HAI prevalence. Their comprehension worsened when they were presented with both written descriptions and numeric data and 40 percent of the participants were unable to correctly identify which hospital was better. The findings thus show that the general public may reach inaccurate conclusions when comparing hospitals using the existing data format on HAIs.

"HAI data are made accessible to the public to help improve hospital quality and increase transparency among healthcare systems. We need more effective ways to communicate this information," said lead author Max Masnick, PhD, University of Maryland School of Medicine.

Source: Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America

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