

## When Selecting a Hospital, Know Your Options

Selecting a hospital for a procedure or inpatient care is an important decision. To help consumers make informed choices, the California Hospital Assessment and Reporting Taskforce (CHART) has developed an online hospital report card. [CalHospitalCompare.org](http://CalHospitalCompare.org) is an easy-to-use source for quality indicators on more than 200 hospitals in California.

Use the following tips to create a checklist of items to discuss with family and your health care team before making your final hospital selection.

- **Ask your doctor.** Find out at which hospital he or she is on staff. Your doctor should also be able to tell you whether the hospital you are considering specializes in your condition and provide an expert opinion on the overall quality and safety of a hospital.
- **Ask family and friends.** Ask them to share their personal experience with you of any hospital you are considering. Chances are they will be more willing to tell you the drawbacks of a particular hospital than would a physician who hasn't been a patient.
- **Find out what your insurance will cover.** Most people are covered by either an HMO or PPO plan through their employer or privately. Each plan has different tiers of coverage, so make sure you know exactly what charges are covered and how much you will have to pay out-of-pocket.
- **Find out how the hospital is rated.** When you look up information on a hospital report card (like CalHospitalCompare.org), it should include criteria such as mortality and infection rates, best practices for quality of care, patient safety, and patient satisfaction. Additional data on quality and safety issues can be researched through health care sites like the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations ([www.jcaho.org](http://www.jcaho.org)) and the National Quality Forum ([www.qualityforum.org](http://www.qualityforum.org)).
- **Communicate your special needs.** Do you have specific language or dietary needs? Does your family know your wishes if a treatment decision must be made for you? Are there maintenance medications or special equipment (hearing aids, glasses or contacts, etc.) you need to have during your hospital stay? All these needs should be respected and confirmed by the hospital where you elect to have your surgery performed.
- **Be prepared.** Pick someone who can keep things running smoothly while you are away and once you return home. Make sure you appoint someone willing and available to make decisions about your care if you are unable to communicate for yourself. They should be familiar with all your doctors and the agreed-upon treatment plan, and all other family members should respect your choice of this person. Finally, prepare an advance directive (a written document that legally empowers an advocate to act on your behalf) that makes clear your wishes regarding artificial life-support and other treatment choices.

Taking these few steps will provide greater peace of mind when it comes time for you to make the important decision on which hospital to choose.

## How Can CalHospitalCompare Help Me?

**CalHospitalCompare.org** is a comprehensive online report card that consolidates information on more than 200 California hospitals into one easy-to-navigate location. Providing this quality and performance data in an accessible format offers consumers a new resource to make many hospital-related decisions.

Here are some scenarios about how consumers can use the CalHospitalCompare site.

### **Making a Move**

Vivian is an accountant at a small software company in Reno, Nevada, and mother of two teenage children. Her husband, a manufacturing technician, has been asked by his employer to relocate to Sacramento. Vivian's elderly parents will also be joining them in the move. Vivian's father has a cardiac condition which needs monitoring.

With CalHospitalCompare, Vivian can easily look up nearby hospitals by Zip code. Once she selects a hospital, she can quickly link to the hospital's Web site and find a specialist for her father, as well as a pediatrician for her children and a primary care physician for her husband.

### **Baby on the Way**

April and her husband are expecting their first child. But with her busy job in sales with a technology company and the demands of her husband's engineering job, they haven't had time to select a hospital for the birth of their baby. There is a hospital in their neighborhood, but is it the right choice for them? What is its safety record? What percentages of the deliveries are by C-Section? Does the hospital routinely allow vaginal birth after C-Section (VBAC)?

By reviewing data on CalHospitalCompare, April can simultaneously compare up to five hospitals in her area, looking up how each rates on such criteria as patient safety and maternity patient satisfaction.

### **Absentee Caregiver**

Abigail, who lives in Illinois, is concerned about the health of her parents who live in California. Her father's physician recently recommended surgery for a heart condition, and her mother has a lot of questions and doubts about the procedure and treatment.

At CalHospitalCompare, Abigail can get information on her parents' current hospital provider as well as look for other facilities in the area that are rated on their surgical care for heart patients. By comparing the ratings on patient outcomes, patient safety and patient experience, Abigail can find a facility that would be a better fit for her parents.