

How Newberry County Memorial Hospital Became One of the Nation's Best

A Conversation with Newberry County Memorial Hospital CEO Ron Vigus



Q. Newberry County Memorial Hospital is ranked in the top 10 percent nationally for quality care. What is this about?

- A. Newberry Hospital is part of the national Hospital Quality Initiative sponsored by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The initiative, which was initiated by the Bush Administration in 2001, is intended to do two things: help consumers make informed decisions about their healthcare by making quality data available and to encourage hospitals and their clinicians to improve the quality of healthcare.

CMS provides evidence-based treatment protocols on specific conditions like heart attacks, pneumonia, surgical care, and heart failure for hospitals to follow. Hospitals then submit outcome data—how well they did on following the protocols—back to CMS. The national rankings are based on this data.

Q. How did a small community hospital like Newberry Hospital become one of the best in the country for quality care?

- A. When it comes to hospitals providing quality care, size does not matter; commitment does. We are very fortunate at Newberry Hospital in that our administration, our medical staff, our nurses, medical technicians, and all other hospital staff trust each other and work together to provide the right care at the right time to the right patient in the right manner.

When we joined the national Hospital Quality Initiative, we made sure everyone understood what we had to do in terms of specific treatment protocols. All of our doctors, nurses, and other clinical staff went through extensive training! Now we constantly monitor and measure what we're doing to ensure everyone follows the evidence-based medical protocols put forth by CMS and we get the results our patients expect and deserve.

Commitment and this constant process of education, communication, monitoring, and measuring performance help ensure we're delivering high quality care to each patient, and is what makes Newberry Hospital one of the nation's best.

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Q. What does the top 10 percent ranking mean to patients of Newberry Hospital?

- A. The bottom line is that because we follow the evidence-based treatment protocols set forth by CMS, our patients experience a safer overall experience, better outcomes and shorter stays in the hospital. When you know you're in good hands, going to the hospital is much less stressful for patients and their families.

Q. Can you provide specific examples of what Newberry Hospital is doing to provide a safe experience for patients?

- A. Infection control is a top priority. Newberry Hospital's infection rates are virtually zero—about one in 1,000 versus— which is quite amazing when you consider that 1.7 million infections occur each year in U.S. hospitals.

Surgical safety is another priority at Newberry Hospital and it shows: we've had no wrong site surgeries. This also bucks a national trend. Joint Commission officials estimate that wrong-site surgery occurs 40 times a week in U.S. hospitals and clinics. We implemented a Surgical Safety Checklist two years ago based on the World Health Organization's (WHO) guidelines. The entire surgical team—surgeon, anesthesiologist/nurse anesthetist, nurses and surgery technologist—run through three sets of checks to prevent mistakes that would harm our patients. When it comes to our patients, we can't be too careful!

Q. What is Newberry Hospital's motivation to be the best it can be?

- A. We know people have a choice in where they go for healthcare services and Newberry Hospital wants to be our community's first choice. So we live our mission everyday to provide exceptional healthcare with a personal touch. We owe it to each patient and their family to do our best every time. Also, there are financial incentives from Medicare, Medicaid, and other insurance companies to treat patients appropriately and avoid mistakes.

Q. This is great news. How are you getting the word out?

- A. If I know our staff, they're sharing it at church, over supper and out in the community. We've also kicked off a media campaign that lets people know they can expect high quality care at Newberry Hospital.

Q. Did you ever think a small town hospital like Newberry could be among the best in the country in terms of quality?

- A. As I mentioned earlier, being exceptional isn't the exclusive realm of large organizations. It simply gets down to commitment, a sense of purpose and pride. Our mission is to provide exceptional healthcare with a personal touch. Newberry Hospital is the community's hospital and we owe it to our friends, families and neighbors to do our best everyday. They are counting on us.