

First-ever back-to-back winner of UHC Quality Leadership Award

UCH Repeats as Quality Champ

A year ago, University of Colorado Hospital was basking in the glow of its top ranking for quality from the University HealthSystem Consortium (UHC), the organization of 116 academic medical centers from around the country.



Bruce Schroffel, then president and CEO of the hospital, called it "our Academy Award." Director of Clinical Effectiveness and Patient Safety Sue West, RN, thrilled with the honor, nonetheless offered a cautionary note.

"If we maintain our attention to safety and quality, we will continue to be recognized as a leader," she said. "But everyone is in the chase" (*Insider*, Sept. 28, 2011).

"Everyone" includes some of the world's most esteemed medical institutions, from the Mayo Clinic to Massachusetts General to Johns Hopkins to University of California, San Francisco.

In terms of quality, they're all still chasing UCH. Today in Orlando, the hospital repeated as winner of UHC's Quality Leadership Award at the organization's annual conference, making it the first medical center ever to earn the distinction in consecutive years.

Pick six. The award honors the academic hospital with the best overall patient outcomes in six clinical categories: patient safety, mortality, clinical effectiveness, equity (meaning that outcomes did not differ for patients of different ethnicities or socioeconomic status), patient satisfaction and clinical efficiency.

"If getting one Academy Award is difficult, earning two in a row is off the charts," Schroffel said. "It's a statement about our collaboration with School of Medicine faculty and University Physicians, Inc. And it shows the great focus of our Epic and quality teams and the entire hospital."

Schroffel said he was especially proud of the 2012 award because the hospital earned it during a time of rapid change.

"To do it twice, in the midst of our Epic implementation, the creation of a \$2.2 billion [University of Colorado Health] system and a \$400 million construction project, and keep the organization running at a high level, it's a testament to leadership throughout this hospital," he said.

Earning the honor a second straight year symbolizes the hospital's ongoing efforts to improve patient safety and the quality of care it delivers, UCH President and CEO John Harney said in a statement.

"We're honored that our hard work is being recognized, but the primary reason we strive for the top is to provide our patients with that award-winning care," Harney said. "From the moment patients step through our doors, we're focused on providing top-quality treatment and a positive experience."

Get it down. Hospital-wide collaboration was central to winning the award again, particularly in light of the hospital's transition to the Epic electronic medical record (EMR) in early September 2011, West said. Documenting clinical care accurately and completely is the key to the UHC quality rankings. At least initially, the change to the EMR from paper and familiar legacy applications made documentation a real challenge, she said.

Throughout the year, Clinical Effectiveness and Patient Safety submits data in each of the six quality categories to UHC. The goal: provide as accurate a snapshot as possible of what physicians, nurses, case managers, social workers, pharmacists, respiratory therapists – indeed, an entire hospital team – did during the course of patient care.

The hospital's Collaborating for Quality Committee, a multidisciplinary group created two years ago, meets regularly to "identify what it is we need to document to clearly reflect the level of care we provide," West said.

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That effort involves extracting and analyzing data from the medical record, asking questions when the documentation is fuzzy, and identifying opportunities for quality initiatives that will raise the level of care.

It's a difficult job under the best of circumstances, but it was especially challenging in the early days of Epic because people were unfamiliar with the new application. A familiar paper-based order set, for example, now might reside in what seemed at first to be an obscure corner of the EMR, West said.



Representatives of the UCH team that won a second University HealthSystem Consortium Quality Leadership Award and a Supply Chain Performance Excellence Award.

Epic kudos. She heaped praise on the Epic team for its commitment to building an EMR that made effective clinical documentation a top organizational goal.

"[Chief Information Officer] Steve Hess made quality a priority in the context of rolling out Epic," West said. "The Epic team did rebuilds and training and spoke with many other teams around the hospital."

Epic physician and nurse champions and a small army of analysts played key roles in helping hospital staff and faculty learn the new system, she added.

"The entire Epic team listened, problem solved and acted on what they could do to contribute to our success with documentation flows," West said.

Obviously proud of the contributions of her quality and safety team, West pointed out that winning the award isn't possible without the cooperation of teams throughout the hospital.

"My team built the platform," she said, "but we got lots of other people to help build the house. We had the commitment and motivation of many different partners within the organization."

None of those partners was more vital than the medical staff, she said.

"Accurate physician documentation means we code correctly, and that reflects the level of care we provide," West said.

The back-to-back awards are something to be proud of, Schroffel said, adding there's still much work to do.

"There is plenty of room for improvement," he said. "It's on to the next step, and that's to raise the bar higher. We should feel a little lucky and have enough humility to know we have to keep doing better. We're good, but we're not good enough."