

Cooper Green hailed in survey

Patients are among nation's most satisfied

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Patients at Cooper Green Mercy Hospital are among the most satisfied in the country, according to data recently released by the federal Centers for Medi-

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▶ Patient satisfaction scores for Birmingham area hospitals. 5A

care & Medicaid Services.

The county-owned Cooper Green had 96 percent of its surveyed patients report they would "definitely" recommend the hospital to others. Shelby

Baptist Medical Center was right behind, with 95 percent offering the strong recommendation.

Those results are far above the hospitals' competitors in the Birmingham area and far outstrip most other hospitals in the country. In fact, Alabama hospitals on average fared better than the national average. The state average for

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the top satisfaction level was 79 percent and the national average was 67 percent.

Rosemary Blackmon, executive vice president of the Alabama Hospital Association, said she wants to believe Alabama hospitals are doing a better job than others, but the report is too new to draw broad conclusions.

The federal government made the patient satisfaction scores public at the end of March on its Hospital Compare Web site. This was the first time CMS collected data on patients' perspectives of their care.

"I think it leaves you with a lot of questions, like anything does when it first comes out," Blackmon said. "But, then again, you hate to discount the good results when hospitals are working really hard to make care better."

Cooper Green officials said the hospital, which treats a largely indigent clientele, has put a lot of effort into improving patient satisfaction and quality of care.

Courtesy matters

"I think our scores say more about our staff than anything else," said Jamie Sullivan, Cooper Green's chief operating officer. "We have an excellent medical staff and employees who realize that courtesy and communication are necessary to successful treatment."

"People choose to work at Cooper Green because they are by nature community servants, and they are truly dedicated to walking hand in hand with patients to meet their medical needs."

For the survey, hospitals used a standardized questionnaire and asked patients who had an overnight stay between October 2006 and June 2007 whether they would definitely recommend the hospital, probably recommend or not recommend the facility. Patients surveyed were randomly selected.

The CMS Web site allows people to compare hospitals within a state, but it does not provide national rankings. The agency wants patients to come to their own conclusions, said Don McLeod, a spokesman with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

"We want very much for this not to become a contest where we rank them," McLeod said.

But an article this week in Modern Healthcare, a trade journal, found from its analysis that rural hospitals and Alabama hospitals did the best on patient satisfaction — "outcomes that are not impossible but invite closer analysis," the article said.

Satisfaction vs. quality

Quality experts have said the definitive link between a patient's perception of care and the actual quality has not been made.

Even so, hospitals in Alabama are taking note of their scores.

"Satisfaction among all patients treated at Baptist Health System hospitals exceeds the national average and is positive relative to the state average," said Ross Mitchell, spokesman for the four-hos-

pital system. "The patient experience is our focus across the system, and we work daily to assure that that experience is as rewarding as possible. It can always be improved."

Brookwood Medical Center uses data from the CMS surveys as well as other questionnaires to make changes to the hospital and its services, said Debbie Hollenstein, Brookwood's spokeswoman. Improvements include additional amenities in patients' rooms, hospital renovations and a plan to create a new women's center.

"Patient feedback makes these projects a reality and gives us clear direction on the types of services they expect," Hollenstein said.

Officials at the two hospitals

in the Birmingham area with the smallest percentages of patients who would definitely recommend them — Medical West in Bessemer and Trinity Medical Center — said they use the data to improve and have much higher patient satisfaction scores from more recent surveys.

"This data is about a year old," said Keith Pennington, chief operating officer at Medical West, which scored the lowest with 57 percent. "We've used this information to guide some things we've done. ... We're proud to say we're moving in the right direction."

For the comparison data, go to www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov.

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PATIENT SATISFACTION

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services asked hospitals to survey their patients about their experiences while hospitalized. Here are the percentage of patients who reported they would definitely recommend the hospital.

Cooper Green Mercy Hospital	96%
Shelby Baptist Medical Center	95%
St. Vincent's St. Clair	92%
St. Vincent's Blount	84%
Walker Baptist Medical Center	84%
UAB Hospital	82%
ALABAMA AVERAGE	79%
St. Vincent's Birmingham	76%
St. Vincent's East	74%
Brookwood Medical Center	72%
Princeton Baptist Medical Center	72%
NATIONAL AVERAGE	67%
Trinity Medical Center	65%
Medical West	57%

* Results were not available for Physicians Medical Center-Carraway and UAB Highlands. Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services