

PERSPECTIVE

Promoting Health Care Transparency and Competition



Give Public Information About Health Care Facilities

Number 2007-3

By Kevin T. Kavanagh,

Consumer driven health care is becoming the insurance product of choice for many employers in Kentucky. These plans which are often called health savings accounts are designed so that the consumer pays the first dollars out of his savings. If his health care is managed well he can accumulate money in this account.

Presently, the only decision most Kentuckians can make is whether or not to obtain care. They cannot effectively shop for the best quality or price of the service.

When high level officials in the Fletcher Administration were questioned early last year as to why the administration's proposed quality criterion was eliminated in the newly enacted Certificate of Need Regulations, their response was that they have difficulty measuring quality in health care facilities.

The Cabinet could have looked at the State of Florida that in November 2005 launched their consumer-friendly website www.floridacomparecare.gov. Using this site a consumer can easily obtain and compare information on hospital quality. Pennsylvania also has hospital infection rates posted online at www.phc4.org. In my childhood home, Erie, PA, one of the hospitals has half the infection rate as the other competing facility. There's no doubt in my mind where I would want to have my operation.

One of the best things a Kentuckian can do is to ask their registered nurse how many patients he/she is taking care of and if they are overworked. If you are on a general medical or surgical floor and your registered nurse is taking care of eight or more patients, a dangerous situation may exist. It has been reported in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) that the patient death rate increases over 30% as the number of patients a registered nurse is responsible for doubles from four to eight.

In addition, the monitoring of the frequency and progression of bed sores and ulcers in patients returning to nursing homes after hospitalization is important. This allows the monitoring by a second party and does not rely solely on a system of self reporting.

Public access of this information is very important. Freedom of Information requests must now be filed with the Cabinet to obtain facility investigative reports, too long of a time when one is sick and desperately needing urgent medical care. In this case, the Fletcher Administration has just to look at the [Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure's](#) website where under the physician profile section investigative and disciplinary actions against physicians can be immediately viewed.

It is not much better getting information from a major hospital accreditation agency, the Joint Commission.

Summary
(Total Word Count 807)

The only decision most Kentuckians can make is whether or not to obtain care. They cannot effectively shop for the best quality or price of the service.

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Promoting Healthcare Quality, Access & Affordability

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Their initial and complete findings are not released to the public. In a letter sent by a Kentucky State Senator requesting such [he received a response which stated:](#)

“Unfortunately, the Joint Commission is unable to provide you with a copy of the accreditation report. The Joint Commission has an obligation to its accredited organizations to keep accreditation related information confidential, including the accreditation report.”

I find this unacceptable. After all, restaurants have all of their findings published in the newspaper. Should not the same standards be set for health care facilities? The Joint Commission’s primary responsibility should be to the public. In a recent [lawsuit by the American Nursing Association](#) against the

Department of Health and Human Services for not assuring adequate nursing care in American hospitals, it is pointed out that the Joint Commission is funded by the organizations it accredits.

Patients are often placed in the predicament of being compelled to buy a product, often from a sole vendor, not knowing its quality or how much it will cost. No wonder the Healthcare Industry does not respond to the

same market forces as other businesses.

Governmental oversight has an important role in assuring quality of health care. Concerns about health care should be made to the provider and egregious infractions can be reported to the State Office of Inspector General, Cabinet for Health and Family Services. By state law, ANYONE who suspects abuse or neglect of an [adult](#) or [child](#) must immediately report or cause a report to be made to the [Department for Community Based Services](#). Anyone includes everyone and not limited to physicians, nurses, law enforcement officers and cabinet personnel. The Cabinet is then required to investigate and notify appropriate agencies. If it does not, it would be a severe infraction of the Cabinet’s responsibility in the protection of the health care of Kentuckians.

Striving to meet regulations certainly has its place in helping to assure competency. However, competition raises the bar to its highest possible level. There is no comparison between meeting a regulation versus striving to outdo your competition down the street. Competition is good for all industries. For this to happen, the veil of secrecy regarding health care quality should be lifted and the Certificate of Need eliminated by the Fletcher Administration.

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This op-ed is an edited version of an article that appeared in the Lexington Herald-Leader on Jan. 29, 2007.

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