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Conference will address MRSA and 'never events'

By Jim Warren

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Issues surrounding hospital-acquired infections and other medical events "that should never happen" will highlight a health care conference in Lexington next week.

The second [Conference for Healthcare Transparency and Patient Advocacy](#) will be Nov. 20 at the Four Points Sheraton in Lexington. Health Watch USA, Consumers Union, Kentucky Watch and the Laurel County and Pulaski County medical societies will sponsor the daylong event.

It follows a similar session last year.

The sponsors think Kentuckians could get better health care and save money by shopping for low prices and high quality — if the health care system were transparent enough to make such information widely available.

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh, a Somerset physician and a prime mover behind the conference, said that one key is making information on hospital-acquired infections more widely available — particularly infections involving drug-resistant germs such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

The state of Kentucky does not track MRSA infections or require hospitals to publicly report hospital-acquired infections. Kavanagh thinks it should.

A principal speaker at the conference will be Lisa McGiffert, who runs [Consumers Union's](#) project to seek public disclosure of health care-acquired infections. Consumers Union publishes Consumer Reports magazine.

McGiffert said 25 states have enacted laws requiring public disclosure of hospital-acquired infections, although many hospital associations and related groups continue to resist the idea.

Kentucky state health officials have said generally that they don't support mandatory reporting because such a system would be complex and costly.

McGiffert said hospitals are nervous about publicly acknowledging that they have such infections.

"Sometimes it seems a bit like a 'Don't ask, don't tell' mentality," she said. "But I think the real problem is a lack of commitment from the top down. We think this is information the public wants and needs."

McGiffert said things might be changing. California passed an infection-reporting law this year, she said, and that state's hospital association didn't actively oppose it.

Another conference topic will concern so-called "never events" — events in health care that should never happen but sometimes do. They include surgery performed on the wrong patient, patients harmed by contaminated drugs, and patients developing skin ulcers in the hospital.

Kavanagh noted that Medicare announced this fall that it will no longer reimburse hospitals for never events, and that some private insurers are doing the same. Such steps could pressure hospitals to do more to prevent never events, he said.

Other speakers at the conference will include Nancy Wilson, senior adviser to the federal [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#); Ken Conner, chairman of the [Center for a Just Society](#); Dr. Kraig Humbaugh, director of epidemiology and health planning for the [Kentucky Department of Public Health](#); and Rudy Rupak, founder of the world's largest medical-tourism company.

There is a \$25 fee for the conference, which includes a box lunch. You can register online until Tuesday at www.Healthcareconference.org. For information, call 1-800-679-7426.

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