

December 22, 2008

Joseph Parker, Ph.D., Director
Healthcare Outcomes Center
Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development
400 R Street, Room 250
Sacramento, CA 95811

**RE: OSHPD Public Release of AHRQ Hospital Inpatient Mortality Indicators
2006 and 2007**

Dear. Dr. Parker:

Our 2006-2007 mortality rates reflect the excellent care that we provide at Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center. We would like to explain why there is one category - acute stroke mortality – with a higher than expected rate in 2007. As San Luis Obispo County's tertiary referral center, Sierra Vista has cared for an increasing number of stroke patients in recent years, many transferred from hospitals within our County for a higher level of care. These patients are transferred from other hospitals to afford them access to our excellent intensivists, hospitalists, neurologists and neurosurgeons that might not be available elsewhere. Sierra Vista maintains the only neurosurgery program in San Luis Obispo County and serves as our area's safety net hospital. It is not uncommon for these transferred patients to be extremely ill and suffering from strokes caused by hemorrhaging in the brain. Unlike strokes caused by ischemia or blood clots, hemorrhagic strokes are typically more serious, more difficult to treat, and more likely to be life threatening. Of the 30 deaths that occurred due to strokes in 2007 at Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center, 23 of those patients had hemorrhagic strokes.

Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center is proud of its ongoing commitment to providing optimal care to all of our patients. Our quality scores reported to CalHospitalCompare.org, the Joint Commission, CMS, the American Heart Association's Get With the Guidelines and a variety of other healthcare entities clearly indicate our continuing compliance to nationally recognized research-based standards.

Our excellent results are especially extraordinary because of the complex and varied types of patients who seek care at Sierra Vista. For example, in addition to providing comprehensive medical and surgical services, including open-heart surgery, trauma and oncology care, we are the only hospital between Santa Barbara and Salinas with a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, a High Risk Pregnancy Program, and a dedicated Pediatrics Unit, in addition to our Neurosurgical Services.

Sincerely,



Candace Markwith
Chief Executive Officer