

December 17, 2010

Merry Holliday-Hanson, PH.D., Manager
Administrative Data Program
Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development
400 R Street, Room 250
Sacramento, CA 95811

SUBJECT: OSHPD Public Release of AHRQ Hospital Inpatient Mortality Indicators, 2008 and 2009

Dear Dr. Holliday-Hanson:

Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center's 2008-2009 mortality rates reflect the excellent care provided by the hospital. We would like to explain why there is one category - acute stroke mortality - with higher than expected rates in 2008 and 2009. 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 other hospitals within our County for a higher level of care that those hospitals are unable to provide themselves. Sierra Vista maintains the only neurosurgery program in San Luis Obispo County and serves as the 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 deaths that occurred at Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center due to strokes in 2008 and 2009, the majority of those patients (over 66%) had hemorrhagic strokes. Additionally, in spite of the high number of patients with hemorrhagic strokes, the total number of stroke patients increased and the mortality rates (both the actual and the risk adjusted rates) declined in both 2008 and 2009, compared to 2007. The severity of illness for stroke patients at Sierra Vista is born out by the risk adjustment factor applied by OSHPD to the hospital's stroke data - in general, the raw mortality percentage is adjusted down for Sierra Vista's stroke patient population as would be expected with a sicker patient population, and adjusted up for stroke patients in other San Luis Obispo hospitals.

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 trauma, neurosurgery/stroke, 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Candy Markwith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Candy" being more prominent than the last name "Markwith".

Candy Markwith
Chief Executive Officer

CLM:bk