

# Complex hospital infection data confuses consumers

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Patients have difficulty deciphering complex numeric data on healthcare-associated infections used by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to help consumers choose hospitals, according to a new study published online today in *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*, the journal of the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).

"Healthcare has made great strides to engage individuals to take a more active role in their care through the [public](#) reporting of data," said lead author Max Masnick, PhD, University of Maryland School of Medicine. "However, presenting healthcare-acquired infection data is difficult. We found that the current way public HAI data are communicated is confusing for consumers who are trying to make informed decisions on their care."

The collection and publication of [hospital](#)-acquired infection (HAI) data are a key element of the Affordable Care Act and other recent healthcare reform legislation as part of an effort to improve care by having [consumers](#) make informed choices. These data are made available to the public via the CMS Hospital Compare website.

Researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine conducted a cross-sectional survey among 110 randomly selected [patients](#) at the University of Maryland Medical Center. The survey asked participants to compare two hypothetical hospitals' frequency of catheter-associated urinary tract infections, using data displayed in the same form currently used on CMS Hospital Compare for use by the general public.

When given only written descriptions of the HAI prevalence in two hospitals, nearly three in 10 participants (28 percent) were unable to accurately identify the better hospital. When participants were given both written descriptions and numeric data together, as presented on the CMS website, comprehension worsened, with 40 percent unable

to correctly identify the better hospital. The authors note that based on these findings, members of the general public may reach incorrect conclusions when comparing hospitals using the current HAI reporting format.

"HAI data are made accessible to the public to help improve hospital quality and increase transparency among healthcare systems. We need more effective ways to communicate this information," said Masnick. Masnick says he and his co-authors are working on ways CMS could improve their website.

**More information:** Max Masnick, Daniel Morgan, John Sorkin, Elizabeth Kim, Jessica Brown, Penny Rheingans, Anthony Harris. "Lack of Patient Understanding of Hospital Acquired Infection Data Published on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Hospital Compare Website." Web (November 23, 2015).

Provided by Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America

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