

Collaboration boosts hospitals

Use of data
helps surgical
outcomes

By Mariann Martin
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CHATTANOOGA — A collaboration used in Tennessee hospitals to improve surgical outcomes is gaining national recognition for its effectiveness as the group more than doubles the number of hospitals involved.

“(Tennessee) is absolutely a standout,” said Clifford Ko, the director of the American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Program and professor of surgery at the University of California. “It is not always so easy to get a group together to work on this issue. Tennessee has been able to do that.”

Ko was one of the speakers at American College of Surgeons’ surgical health care quality forum held in Chattanooga this weekend. Friday’s session — called Quality Improvement Day — focused on the surgical quality initiatives and ways doctors and hospitals

can improve outcomes further.

The Tennessee Surgical Quality Collaborative, formed in 2008, is led by the Tennessee Chapter of the American College of Surgeons and the Tennessee Hospital Association, with funding from the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation. On Friday, BlueCross announced funding of nearly \$4 million to extend the initiative through 2014.

The three-part collaborative is the only one of its kind across the nation, Ko said, and has been key in making the collaborative effective. The money will be used to increase the initial 10 hospitals to 21 across the state. In Chattanooga, Erlanger Health System has participated in the collaborative previously, and Memorial Health Care System joined this year.

The program has improved surgical outcomes and saved millions of dollars, those involved say.

Ko said the data used in the collaborative — known as the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program or NSQIP — is increasingly being recognized as an effective tool in

measuring surgical outcomes. The program is outcomes-based and risk-adjusted, which takes into account the differences in patients being treated by hospitals.

The Hospital Compare website will begin reporting NSQIP data for some hospitals in October as part of a pilot program, Ko said. In the past, Hospital Compare data has been based largely on claims data, which may not be as accurate, he said. As more hospitals use the program, Ko said they plan also to begin evaluating individual surgeon’s data on surgical outcomes and reporting that to the hospital.

Chris Clarke, vice president of the Tennessee Hospital Association, said it will be up to individual hospitals — and probably some time in the future — before doctors’ surgical outcomes would be made public.

“The first step in transparency is making the information available internally and look deep to really improve care for the patient,” Clarke said.

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