

TODAY'S HEALTH FOR THE EMPOWERED WOMAN

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Hospital Penalties

In previous articles I have discussed how the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”) has, in many cases, adversely affected health care and the practice of medicine. Having practiced in a level one hospital (as is Oswego) for over 35 years I am sensitive to the financial strain that is ever present while trying to deliver state of the art health care to a generally underserved and poor community. That Oswego has fallen upon hard times is no secret and the percentage of patients on Medicare and Medicaid that falls under the federal government CMS has increased substantially. One of the more draconian provisions of Obamacare is that hospitals and providers who bill Medicaid or Medicare and have a surgical or medical complication as a result of that care will not be paid. While this seems fair on the surface it is patently punitive for level one hospitals. Standard cookbook medicine teaches that a patient should not have a wound infection or pneumonia or a urinary tract infection after surgery, just to name the most common complications. However, any physician or hospital that claims that they do not get complications is deceptive at the very least. No one is perfect. But here is the problem: there is no question (and new studies confirm) that hospitals that take care of the poorest patients also have the sickest patients: for example-obesity, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, heavy cigarette smoking etc. In spite of these comorbidities physicians at level one hospitals take care of all comers despite the risks. It is equally well documented and taught extensively to doctors in training that diabetes and obesity increase the risk of poor wound healing, heart attack, blood clots, etc. Should the hospital and/or provider be penalized for taking care of the sickest of the sick? What if a pet should jump upon the abdomen of a post-operative patient and rupture the suture line or a three pack a day smoker gets pneumonia? To financially penalize the hospital is utterly ridiculous. Imagine the horrific circumstances if local hospitals refused to take Medicaid or Medicare. The practice of medicine is an art as well as a science and cannot be practiced in a cookbook manner. Yes, there are sometimes awful outcomes and complications caused by a combination of physician and hospital mistakes that must be investigated and appropriate penalties levied if there is found to be incompetence or negligence. However, each case must be looked at individually with the understanding that some complications are inevitable and are sometimes caused by the patient’s own misbehaviors or failure to follow a doctor’s orders or to modify their own lifestyle. When the government gets between a physician and his patient nothing good can come of it regardless of the intentions. Our local hospitals, while not perfect, are doing a great job of taking care of complicated patients and no amount of high tech can prevent all adverse outcomes. Let us not penalize these hospitals for doing the right thing.