



Assembly Passes Bill Requiring Hospitals To Report Infections Contracted There

BY HANA ALBERTS - Special to the Sun
June 24, 2005

Riding on the support of medical and consumer advocacy groups, the Assembly and the state Senate passed a bill this week that requires hospitals to release statistics on infections patients contract on-site.

The legislation was championed by a former lieutenant governor, Betsy McCaughey, who split bitterly with Governor Pataki and later sought to run against him. The bill now goes to Mr. Pataki to sign into law or veto.

After quitting electoral politics, Ms. McCaughey founded the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths, known as RID. Under the bill, hospitals would report data to the Department of Health on two types of illnesses commonly acquired during a hospital stay: infections resulting from a surgical incision and bloodstream infections from the insertion of an intravenous tube in the patient's chest. The state Department of Health would publish the statistics annually on its Web site.

Each year, 90,000 patients die from hospital-acquired diseases, and more than 2 million contract them, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ms. McCaughey said the bill enables consumers to pick the safest hospitals.

"If you have to be hospitalized, you should know which hospital in your area has serious infection problems," Ms. McCaughey said. "People shouldn't be losing their loved ones to these preventable problems."

A Manhattan Democrat who sponsored the bill in the Assembly, Richard Gottfried, said it also allows hospitals to evaluate their performance in comparison to peer institutions.

"It will help hospitals know whether they are doing as good a job as they think they are," Mr. Gottfried said. "They are now going to be able to identify the areas they can improve."

The Legislature has considered earlier formulations of the bill over the past four years, but this particular bill has been in the pipeline for only four months. Texas, Virginia, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, and Pennsylvania have comparable laws.

"Hospitals usually are not anxious to enter into a public reporting system that compares them," the director of the Center for Medical Consumers, Arthur Levin, said. "What's significant here in New York is that everyone got together in support."

Some hospitals were reluctant to support the legislation until it took on its current form, which ensures the reporting takes into account the patient population a hospital serves, according to a spokesman for the Healthcare Association of New York State, Matthew Cox.

"If you didn't adjust, it would look like the hospital treating AIDS and cancer patients was not doing its job well at all because there were more bad outcomes, but that would not necessarily be true," Mr. Cox said.

This spring, New York-Presbyterian Hospital came under fire for an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease that infected eight patients, contributing to the deaths of two, according to a hospital spokesman, Bryan Dotson.

Hospitals already are required to report cases of Legionnaires disease to city and state authorities, but Ms. McCaughey said patients are more prone to other infections.

"This waterborne bacteria Legionella is a drop in the bucket compared to the serious drug-resistant infections that cost thousands of New Yorkers their lives," she said. "This law will be an important victory for New York patients and their families."

Correction from June 28, 2005

Seven patients at New-York Presbyterian Hospital have been diagnosed with Legionnaires disease since March 2004. An article on page 4 in the June 24–26 New York Sun stated an incorrect number.