

Three San Francisco hospitals do well in infection report

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Three San Francisco hospitals -- St. Luke's, St. Mary's and Saint Francis -- reported zero central-line bloodstream infections in patients in their ICUs in 2008, according to Consumer Reports.

Central lines are catheters inserted through a patient's jugular vein or subclavian vein (beneath the clavicle, or collarbone) and into the heart to deliver medicine, fluids and nutrition to very ill people in intensive care units. Infection rates in those central lines vary widely by hospital, the report said, but "common-sense" procedures like strict handwashing, equipment sterilization, wearing masks, caps and gowns, removing catheters promptly and avoiding use of veins in the groin can prevent them.

Infections through central lines probably cause 30 percent of the 99,000 annual deaths in the United States from hospital infections, the report said. On average, a central-line infection adds \$42,000 to the cost of treating a patient.

St. Luke's Hospital, Saint Francis Memorial Hospital and St. Mary's Medical Center in San Francisco all reported zero such infections in 2008. But UCSF Medical Center, for example, had an infection rate 80 percent worse than the national average, the report said.

Kaiser Permanente's hospitals in Hayward, Santa Rosa, Vallejo and South San Francisco also reported zero central-line infections in the report. Kaiser's San Francisco hospital reported an infection rate 40 percent better than the national average, while the Kaiser hospital in San Jose had a rate 14 percent worse than the average.

California Pacific Medical Center's Pacific Campus had a rate 43 percent better than the national average, while CPMC's Davies Campus had zero central-line infections in 2008.

Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City, O'Connor Hospital and Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, Marin General Hospital in Greenbrae, Mills Peninsula in Burlingame, and El Camino Hospital and Los Alamitos Medical Center in Mountain View also reported zero of the infections.

Consumer Reports and Leapfrog Group produced the report, based on Leapfrog Group data, gathered voluntarily from hospitals.

"As a country, we have a health-care system that's been largely unaccountable to the public it serves," said Leapfrog Group's CEO, Leah Binder, in the report. Laws mandating public disclosure of infection rates are vital to improving performance, Leapfrog Group says, noting that the number of infections dropped 8 percent between 2006 and 2007 in Pennsylvania, the first state to publicly report hospital infections.

California has passed a mandatory reporting law, but hasn't started disclosing rates to the public. The state's first report on central-line infections isn't due for nearly a year.

San Francisco General Hospital and Oakland's Highland Hospital declined to take part in the survey, as did Alta Bates Summit's two campuses in Berkeley and Oakland, Alameda Hospital, Dameron Hospital in Stockton, Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo, Eden Medical Center's two campuses in Castro Valley and San Leandro, Healdsburg District Hospital, Novato Community Hospital, Petaluma Valley Hospital, Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa, San Mateo Medical Center, Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, Sonoma Valley Hospital, St. Rose Hospital in Hayward, Sutter Health hospitals in Vallejo, Davis, Antioch, Sacramento and Santa Rosa, Valleycare Health System in Pleasanton, and Washington Hospital Healthcare System in Fremont.