

Berkshire Eagle (Pittsfield, MA)

February 5, 2009

Section: Top Story

Berkshire Medical Center earns honors

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Thursday, February 05 PITTSFIELD — Berkshire Medical Center has been named a distinguished hospital by a consumer health company, one of 270 hospitals in the nation and only two in the state. HealthGrades, which rates 5,000 hospitals annually and publishes the information on a Web site for patients — www.healthgrades.com — has given Berkshire Medical Center a Distinguished Hospital Award for Clinical Excellence. To earn the award, **BMC** had to rank in the top 5 percent of hospitals across 26 procedures and diagnoses. The only other hospital to earn the ranking in Massachusetts was Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

"There are many good hospitals who might have a five-star excellence award in one specialty," said Bob Donohue, vice president of HealthGrades, "but as far as having quality across the board, this is an entire hospital success. It is a matter of great team effort and is something that doesn't happen overnight. It is quite an accomplishment."

To create its rankings, HealthGrades uses data collected from 41 million Medicare patients over a three-year span. It analyzes outcomes for more than two dozen procedures and conditions, from appendectomy to valve replacement. It runs that data through a statistical model and determines whether a hospital performed better than expected, as expected, or worse than expected. Hospitals that perform better than expected receive five stars for their treatment. **BMC** received five stars for its treatment of stroke, heart attack, sepsis, respiratory failure, pneumonia and pancreatitis, among other accolades. Those that meet expectations are given three stars, those that fall below get one star. The ratings are then averaged, creating a score for the institution. "Our studies show that patients treated at a hospital like Berkshire, on average, are 27 percent less likely to face in-hospital mortality and 8 percent less likely to suffer any complications than if they were treated at other hospitals," Donohue said.

Susan Kormanik, chairwoman of **BMC's** board of trustees, said the award is an honor for the hospital staff that recognizes years of hard work.

"Even more than what it means to the staff is what it means to the patients in Berkshire County who avail themselves of the hospital's services," Kormanik said. "It is an amazing award and comes after a string of awards. In many ways, **BMC** is Berkshire County's best-kept secret." **BMC** has been repeatedly honored by the American Heart Association for its treatment of stroke and heart attack victims under the "Get with the Guidelines" program that champions ensuring patients get basic but crucial care that can improve their outcomes.

Dr. Gray Ellrodt, **BMC's** medical director, said the hospital has been working toward this goal for years, seeking to build on incremental improvements like the Get with the Guidelines program. "After years of focusing our efforts on improving care, those efforts are now coming to fruition," Ellrodt said. "We have focused most on the processes that improve the quality of patient care. We are seeing the results of that."

David Phelps, president and CEO of **BMC's** parent company, Berkshire Health Systems, said the hospital has rebuilt from a state of financial crisis 15 years ago to a point of clinical excellence today.

"We knew we had to build our financial strength to be clinically strong," Phelps said. "We decided that people shouldn't have to settle for access to less-than-extraordinary care. Our goal was that, for the things we do that Mass General does, it should be at least as good for our community." **BMC** will never offer the full range of care that Mass General does, Phelps said. It lacks a big enough patient population to justify procedures like open-heart surgery, organ transplants and similarly complex care. But it has tried to offer what the community needs, exceeding what most community hospitals offer.

"We have made significant investments in people, technology and our facilities. That has allowed us to recruit people ... that buy into the view that we are trying to build something special here and we are having success," Phelps added. "I hope it gives people in the community comfort to know that if something happens to you here, you are in good hands."

The accolades

Berkshire Medical Center has been named a distinguished hospital by HealthGrades. Some of the highlights of HealthGrades findings for BMC:

- Ranked No. 1 in state for overall pulmonary services.
- Ranked No. 1 in state for gastrointestinal medical treatment.
- Ranked No. 1 in state for overall critical care.
- Ranked No. 3 in state for treatment of stroke.
- Ranked No. 4 in state for bariatric surgery.