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DHEC releases infection data

Agency tracking three types of infections patients acquire while they are hospitalized

By Jill Coley
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On Monday, state health officials published data about hospital-acquired infections. More than 250 Americans die daily from infections they got as hospital patients.

"We know that the vast majority of these infections are preventable," said Dr. Jerry Gibson, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's director of disease control.

So far, DHEC tracks only certain types of infections: central line-associated bloodstream infections; surgical site infections for selected procedures; and laboratory blood cultures positive for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, also known as MRSA.

DHEC also tracks infections by where they occur in the hospital, and hospitals are grouped by size, function and risk groups.

More info

[View reports on hospital-acquired infections](#) on the DHEC web site.

"You can't compare small hospitals to large hospitals," said Dixie Roberts, section director for health care infections reporting.

Applying so many parameters makes the data difficult to search and compare, critics say.

Roberts said officials had planned to make the data searchable by hospital or county, but budget cuts have eliminated programming.

Take, for example, infections of central lines, tubes placed in large veins to allow fluids or medication to be given for a long period of time.

In adult medical-surgical critical care units, only one area hospital strayed beyond the statistical norm. Trident Medical Center had a higher than expected rate of bloodline infections at 3 per 1,000 central line days. The Medical University of South Carolina hospital, however, was not included in that comparison because of how the hospital classifies its units.

The Medical University of South Carolina's medical intensive care unit had a rate of 3.7,

but that number was considered not statistically different, according to the classification system DHEC uses.

Bridget Denzik, assistant chief nursing officer with Trident, said the hospital has lowered its rate to 2.2 in the past six months, with staff and physician education and new technology to monitor patients.

The Hospital Infections Disclosure Act became state law in May 2006 and mandates that hospitals report preventable infections to health officials. The latest data is from July 1, 2007, to Nov. 30, 2008.

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