

# Web site rates hospitals

## Strand facilities show up on page with health care reviews, rankings

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- [MY SC Hospitals – http://www.myschospitals.org](http://www.myschospitals.org)
- [Hospital Compare http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)

ONLINE Find links to the hospital review Web sites at <http://www.MyrtleBeachOnline.com>.

Patients at coastal Carolinas hospitals have a new tool to see how area hospitals stack up against those across the country.

A new feature on the Web site of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services allows users to read patient reviews and see ratings of the hospitals' procedures.

The site, <http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov>, contains information that compares hospitals' common surgical practices, and has feedback from patients, who rate the care they received.

This is the latest initiative within the health care industry to be more open about business practices.

The move is also a way to inform consumers and persuade them to make educated decisions on their health care needs, local health care leaders said.

Several coastal Carolinas hospitals are listed on the site: Grand Strand Regional Medical Center, Georgetown Hospital System, which owns Georgetown Memorial and Waccamaw Community hospitals, Loris Community Hospital of Loris Healthcare System, Conway Regional Medical Center, and Brunswick Community Hospital of Brunswick County, N.C.

Seacoast Medical Center, which is owned by Loris Healthcare, is not featured on the Web site because the hospital does not have inpatient services. Seacoast's classification will change after its expansion, where 50 inpatient beds will be added.

In South Carolina, the average percentage of patients receiving antibiotics an hour before surgery is 84 percent, and 60 percent of patients said they always received help when they wanted it, according to the site.

The Web site contains information on 2,521 hospitals throughout the U.S. More than 1 million people were surveyed.

Loris Healthcare officials are pleased with the Web site because it helps educate the consumer, spokeswoman Celeste Bondurant-Bell said.

The S.C. Hospital Association launched a Web site early this year, [myschospitals.org](http://myschospitals.org), which contains information on roughly 65 hospitals

throughout the state. Hospital leaders have said if people have the chance to research hospitals before getting care, some situations and complaints could be avoided.

Unlike the health departments' Web site, the association's site does not have consumer feedback information, but plans to make it available by next quarter, said Aunyika Moonan, S.C. Hospital Association quality and measurement services director.

Several hospitals were unable to submit accurate data, she said.

"We decided to wait until all issues were settled with the H-CAP Survey [the patient feedback measure that was used] before we made it available to the public."

Meanwhile, on the U.S. health department's Web site, consumers can search for hospitals in their state and select three to compare.

Patients can use such measures as zip codes or state names to search for hospitals. As long as the information being sought was submitted by the hospital, patients can view data on services and procedures that range from heart failure and pneumonia care processes to intestine operations to female reproductive operations.

Patients were asked via survey if they always received help as soon as they asked: 50 percent of Grand Strand Regional patients, 72 percent of Loris Community and 59 percent of Georgetown Memorial patients said they did.

Consumer feedback is sometimes "subjective," Bondurant-Bell said.

"When surveys are conducted by an organization that's familiar with the business of health, there's more continuity," she said.

"But having Web sites where patients can write about [or rate] their personal experience is inclined to be more subjective and misunderstood," she said.

Grand Strand Regional spokeswoman Joan Carroza said the data used for the Web site is from third quarter 2007, which is old.

"We already have later reports [from first quarter 2008] and we have improved," she said, adding that another issue with the survey is the questions.

"The question asks if patients 'always' receive care ... but it doesn't report if patients 'usually' receive care," Carroza said.

To get an accurate depiction of health care services, consumers should talk to friends, neighbors and their physicians, and not rely only on Web sites, Carroza said.

It's also important that patients who submit these types of surveys "understand what the questions mean and what standards they represent," Bondurant-Bell said.

Officials at Conway Medical Center, whose patient feedback information isn't listed on the U.S. health site because of a technical problem that held up the data, said patient responses are essential.

Spokeswoman Julie Rajotte said Conway Medical, which uses phone surveys instead of paper submissions, received "very specific information" from the surveys about situations that patients wanted improved, such as obstetrics patients being able to eat when they wanted to.

"And we've been able to implement strategies to address [those concerns]," Rajotte said.

These types of reports may bring out some hospitals' flaws, but "hospitals can use it to improve their service to patients," she said.