

Queens, Woodhull Given A's

# Hospital System Earns Patient-Care Plaudits

By BOB HENNELLY

Health + Hospitals, the city's public-hospital system, has won national recognition for keeping its patients safe from preventable harm and medical errors. According to the Leapfrog Group, a national non-profit dedicated to tracking hospital performance, the only hospitals in the city to earn an A or B grade for patient safety were five Health + Hospitals facilities.

Lapses in hospital coordination and communication, as well as preventable patient injuries, accidents and infections kill 200,000 American a year, making it the third-leading cause of death in the nation.

## National Results

The Leapfrog rating assigned A, B, C, D and F letter grades to more than 2,600 U.S. hospitals across the nation. Of the 2,633 hospitals evaluated, 844 earned an "A," 658 got a "B," 954 were given a "C," 157 received a "D" and 20 absorbed an "F."

According to Leapfrog's Fall 2016 national Hospital Safety Grade, both NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens and NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull earned A's, while NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem, NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan, and NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx got B's. All of the public system's 11 hospitals received at least a "C."

"The physician's time-honored oath to do no harm is not new to health care, but at NYC Health + Hospitals, we are working harder than ever to take patient safety to the next level," wrote Dr. Ram Raju, president and CEO of the agency, in response to this newspaper's query on the survey results. "Having the five top-scoring hospitals in New York City this year only motivates us more to continue improving the quality of care for each and every patient we serve."

Dr. Raju previously said that one of his top priorities was to improve the public's perception about the quality of care provided by the city's municipal system. Officials at NYC Health + Hospitals believe this national rating will be helpful in that regard in what is increasingly a very competitive regional health-care market. Since 2003, 16 hospitals have had to close in the city.

## Employ 40,000

The system has close to 40,000 employees who include members of the Doctors Council, SEIU 1199, the New York State Nurses Association, and DC 37.

In New York City, the only "F" grades reported were for SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn and St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway, Queens.

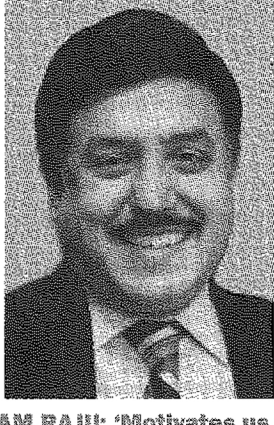
A call to St. John's was not returned. But the spokesman for SUNY Downstate Medical Center defended that hospital's track record. "The rating from Leapfrog does not reflect the reality of safety procedures at SUNY Downstate's University Hospital of Brooklyn, nor does it reflect the fact that as an academic medical center and safety-net hospital, Downstate cares for patients with more-complex diseases and at higher risk for complications," wrote Ronald Najman, the hospital's Director of Communications.

"Downstate takes the safety of our patients very seriously and we continuously implement new strategies to address patient safety and patient satisfaction. For example, we recently enrolled our ICUs in a year-long safety program offered by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) the premier agency for advancing patient safety."

## How Grades Are Decided

Several of the public system's competitors, based here in the city, received a "D" grade.

The Leapfrog Group is the only independent ratings



RAM RAJU: 'Motivates us to do even better.'



SCOTT STRINGER: Cites growing financial pressure.

program that focuses solely on how effectively hospitals keep their patients safe. It was founded in 2000 by large employers and other health-care-service purchasers. Its analyses are based on hospital track records for protecting patient safety by reducing medical errors, injuries, accidents, and preventable infections.

Participation in the survey is voluntary and the results are made available online so that health-care consumers can make a comparison between health-care providers. New York State ranks 47th nationally in the survey, with just 10.9 percent of the 138 hospitals that participated earning an "A" grade.

The good news for the city's public hospitals came at a time when the nation's largest municipal system faces significant budget challenges even after Mayor de Blasio's \$2-billion infusion for a network that provides care for more than 1 million New Yorkers at its 70 hospitals, clinics and outpatient-care facilities.

## Caring Comes At Price

Formed in 1969, the city's municipal hospital system for decades has provided universal health care to any person who appeared at one of its facilities. No one is turned away, and unlike private hospitals, member facilities don't have the cost-saving option of just stabilizing seriously ill patients and then transferring them to some other facility.

But top officials with the city's public-hospital system maintain that its longstanding commitment to provide care to all New Yorkers, regardless of their ability to pay, or their immigration status, is under considerable fiscal pressure since the Affordable Health Care Act was enacted in 2010.

The ACA expressly prohibits any undocumented adults from being covered. In May of last year, City Comptroller Scott Stringer flagged this problematic confluence in a report entitled "Holes in the Safety Net: Obamacare and the Future of NY City's Health and Hospitals Corporation."

According to the city's filing 14 months ago with the Financial Control Board, the system's operating losses were projected to double by fiscal year 2019, which begins in July of 2018. Yearly operating losses are projected to go from \$984 million in 2016 to \$1.83 billion by 2019. When debt service is added in, the numbers are even more dire, going from a \$1.1-billion loss in 2016, to \$1.95-billion shortfall in 2019.

## IBO Charts Problem

Earlier this year, the city's Independent Budget Office released a study that found that after the full implemen-

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## H + H Wins Plaudits

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tation of the ACA, the percentage of city residents without health-care coverage dropped from about to 21 percent in 2013 to roughly 14 percent in 2014. Yet IBO's review showed that as of last year, still more than 1 in 4 of the patients using the municipal hospital system outpatient and diagnostic facilities were uninsured.

DC 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido hailed the grades as evidence of the need for additional support for the public-health system. "These grades are a reflection of the high quality of care that New Yorkers are provided with at all our public hospitals, which are staffed with thousands of dedicated public employees," said Mr. Garrido. "This is why the fight for a fair funding formula for these hospitals is so critical."