

For Immediate Release:
April 23, 2009

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Department of Health Leads Healthcare-Associated Infections Advisory Committee New Law Furthers Work in Reporting Healthcare-Associated Infections

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health is leading the permanent Healthcare-Associated Infections Advisory Committee, as established by a bill that Governor Bill Richardson signed this year. Senate Bill 408, sponsored by Sen. Dede Feldman, mandates committee membership, requires members to establish standards for reporting hospital-associated infections, trains hospitals to assure proper reporting, and develops and distributes findings, as appropriate, to the public.

“Nationwide, hospital acquired infections account for 100,000 deaths per year and cost the health care system \$3 billion. New Mexico must address this problem now, before it gets any worse,” said Sen. Feldman, chairman of the New Mexico Legislature's interim Health and Human Services Committee, which pushed for the bill. “Working together, I know our hospitals can solve this problem and I hope the solution comes sooner, rather than later.”

The Healthcare-Associated Infections Advisory Committee will identify specific infections and indicators that hospitals will report. The Committee will guide hospitals with intensive care units to report on two measures to begin with: central-line associated bloodstream infections and influenza vaccination rates of their healthcare workers. The Committee will consider additional indicators over time.

“This bill furthers the work that we began last year with our voluntary pilot project involving six hospitals,” said Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD. “The goal of this work is to prevent and control healthcare-associated infections so patients receive better care.”

In 2007, the New Mexico Legislature asked the Department of Health to create a task force to study the feasibility of requiring hospitals to report healthcare-associated infections. The Department appointed a multi-disciplinary task force composed of infection-control practitioners, a consumer advocate and members of New Mexico Hospital Association, New Mexico Medical Review Association and Association of Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology. Membership will stay the same.

In July 2008, six participating hospitals began reporting central-line associated bloodstream infections. These infections result from having an intravenous (IV) catheter that can lead to bacteria invading a patient's bloodstream if the IV is not properly cared for. Hospitals also reported influenza vaccination rates of their health-care workers during this flu season.

Participating hospitals are University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center in Albuquerque, Gerald Champion Regional Medical Center in Alamogordo, Heart Hospital of New Mexico in Albuquerque, Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces, San Juan Regional Medical Center in Farmington and Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque.

The Department of Health is collecting data that applies to different kinds and sizes of hospitals. Facilities can measure and improve vaccination rates and decrease central-line associated bloodstream infections.

The Department plans to issue a report at the end of the pilot year, June 30, 2009. The hospitals' data will be confidential for the pilot year as the Advisory Committee determines the best way to interpret the information and provide the data to the public in an understandable and useful manner.

After the year-long pilot, the Advisory Committee will make recommendations about how to get the best information for public reporting purposes. The Advisory Committee will consider how to expand the program and when to add more measures for reporting.

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