

Hospitals' ratings solid


Local centers all above state, national averages

By **Christena T. O'Brien**

Leader-Telegram staff

The federal government's latest survey of hospital patients is out, and for the first time, the ratings are available for all Chippewa Valley hospitals.

Ranked highest for overall patient satisfaction was OakLeaf

 **To access the survey results, log on to www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov.**

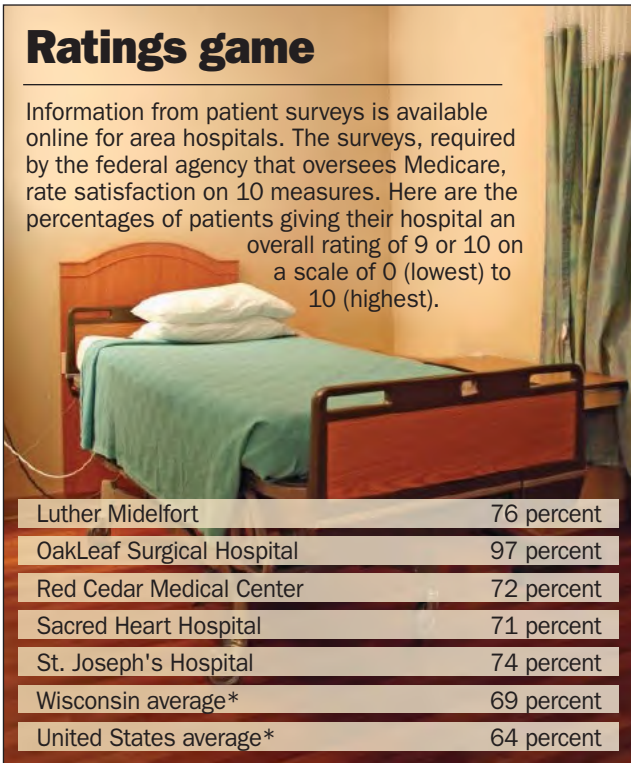
Surgical Hospital. Among full-service hospitals, Luther Midelfort, St. Joseph's

Hospital, Red Cedar Medical Center and Sacred Heart Hospital also received overall scores above the statewide and national averages.

The rankings, available on Medicare's "Hospital Compare" Web site, are based on patient surveys required by the federal government. The surveys gauge how well doctors and nurses communicate, whether patients believe they

Ratings game

Information from patient surveys is available online for area hospitals. The surveys, required by the federal agency that oversees Medicare, rate satisfaction on 10 measures. Here are the percentages of patients giving their hospital an overall rating of 9 or 10 on a scale of 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest).



* Both are averages for all reporting hospitals.

Staff graphic

Source: Hospital Compare Web site, a tool provided by Medicare

See **HOSPITALS**, Page 2A

Hospitals/OakLeaf mainly a surgery center

from Page 1A

received help in a timely manner, and whether they would recommend a hospital to others.

Of the five local facilities, 97 percent of patients responding to the survey said they'd recommend OakLeaf; 79 percent of Luther Midelfort patients, 78 percent of Sacred Heart patients, 76 percent of St. Joseph's patients and 73 percent of Red Cedar's patients reported the same.

Michael McClain, chief executive officer of OakLeaf, was pleased with the surgical hospital's scores.

"I think patient satisfaction is one of the areas specialty hospitals excel in," he said.

"Here, the one thing we focus on very heavily is the patient experience," McClain said. "We're smaller, so I think we can respond to patients' needs better."

That said, unlike full-service hospitals, OakLeaf solely focuses on surgery patients, he noted.

The results of the patient surveys were first released by some hospitals, including Luther Midelfort, last year. The government required all hospitals to disclose their survey results this year.

The surveys are limited only to patients requiring an overnight stay.

"Overall, I was impressed with the overall scores for our community," said Pam Prissel, Luther Midelfort director of customer service. "I

think we're fortunate to have good health care in the Chippewa Valley."

That said, officials at Luther Midelfort are always looking for ways to improve.

"We know it's not always a patient's first choice to come to a medical facility, so we're always trying to make the experience the best it can be," she said.

In some cases, specific measures such as the percentage of surgery patients given the right antibiotic at the right time might be important but not relevant to most people. In others, the rankings can be confusing.

A study published late last year in *Health Affairs*, a policy journal, found that the rankings vary widely. Even in the same market, a hospital near the top in one ranking might be near the bottom in another.

Still, the *Health Affairs* study noted that patients want to know about other patients' experiences: Did patients receive help quickly from the staff? Was their pain well-controlled? Did the staff explain what a medication was for?

Those are among the 10 measures of patient satisfaction available on the "Hospital Compare" site.

Hospitals have long surveyed patients on what they thought of their care. But using those results as a gauge of hospital quality and disclosing them publicly represent a cultural change.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.