

Schwarzenegger Vetoes Hospital Infection Control Bill

Californians will remain in the dark about whether their local hospital is failing to keep infection risks low now that Governor Schwarzenegger has vetoed SB 1487. The bill would have required public disclosure of hospital infection rates. Each year thousands of Californians die from infections they pick up in the hospital and many others suffer needlessly from infection-related illnesses.

"Hospital infections are a leading cause of death in the U.S. and yet patients have no way of knowing whether their hospital is doing a good job minimizing such hazards," said Earl Lui, Senior Staff Attorney with Consumers Union's West Coast Office. "By vetoing this legislation, Governor Schwarzenegger missed an opportunity to shine the spotlight on this serious public health threat and to make our hospitals safer." The CDC says that one in 20 patients get an infection while hospitalized. The California Department of Health Services estimates 7,200 to 9,600 Californians die every year from hospital-acquired infections. Nationally, an estimated 90,000 people die annually from infections contracted in the hospital, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Another 1.9 million Americans develop these infections and many of them endure longer stays in the hospital getting treated for and recovering from infection-related illnesses. A single hospital infection incident can add \$38,600 to a patient's hospital bill and as much as \$58,000 for one of the most serious infections, postoperative sepsis. Overall, hospital infections add \$5 billion to our nation's health care bill. Studies show that infection rates could be reduced by up to 70 percent if proper procedures, especially hand washing, were followed. Many hospitals track their own infection rates, but they are not currently required to report this information to any regulatory agency in California. SB 1487 would have required hospitals to report to the Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development the rate at which their patients develop infections during treatment and mandated that the agency make this information publicly available. Similar hospital infection reporting requirements recently have been adopted in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Florida. Several states have established mandatory hospital reporting requirements for such things as the outcome of heart surgeries, which has helped to improve the quality of care that patients receive. Likewise, public reporting of hospital-acquired infection data will give hospitals a much stronger incentive to reduce the rate of infections. In his veto message on SB 1487, the Governor indicated that hospitals are already required to have infection control programs in place and that there is sufficient government oversight to make sure that they are enforced. However, some hospitals are failing to make sure that infection control procedures are rigorously followed. For example, the National Quality Forum reports that hand washing compliance rates at hospitals are less than 50 percent. Moreover, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations (JCAHO) has done a poor job of making sure that hospitals follow infection control procedures. The agency accredits hospitals for the federal government and other forms of hospital oversight lean heavily on JCAHO's accreditation process. JCAHO checks on whether hospitals have infection control practices in place, but not on the rate at which these infections are actually occurring. Since 1995, JCAHO has "required" hospitals to voluntarily report serious infection-related injuries or deaths. Over the past nine years, only 42 such reports have been made, even though the CDC estimates that more than 800,000 people died from infections during that period. Further, in a recent study the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that JCAHO failed to detect two-thirds of the serious hospital deficiencies identified through other means. "Public reporting of infection rates would put pressure on hospitals to do a better job protecting their patients and help consumers select the safest hospitals," said Imholz. "Unfortunately, Governor Schwarzenegger has given in to the pressure of the politically powerful hospital industry, which lobbied hard for a veto because it wants to keep this information secret." More information about hospital acquired infections and Consumers Union's campaign to require hospitals to public disclose their infection rates can be found at: www.StopHospitalInfections.org.

Referred from: (<http://www.consumeraffairs.com>)