Are hospitals meeting diversity challenge? 'Sort of,' new survey says

Nearly 80% of hospitals educating staff about cultural diversity

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June 11, 2012

Hospitals are working harder to promote equitable care, according to a survey released Thursday from the AHA's Institute for Diversity in Health Management, but there still is room for improvement.

The AHA's Health Research & Educational Trust surveyed 924 hospitals, to gauge how hospitals are addressing disparities in care and discovered the majority are collecting patient data related to diversity.

About 94% of hospitals are tracking racial data, and 90% are measuring patients' primary languages, but only 18% of the hospitals were actually using that data to benchmark gaps in care, the survey says.

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Fred Hobby, president and CEO of the Institute for Diversity, says hospitals may be failing to meaningfully use the data for fear of liability issues should they acknowledge disparities in care. Others simply lack the knowledge to carry out such a program or a “diversity champion” to lead the effort.

Hospitals have made strides in educating staff—nearly 80% said they educate all clinical staff about how to address unique linguistic and cultural factors affecting diverse patients, and 61% said they require all employees to attend diversity training. Hospital executive suites also are becoming more diverse, Hobby says; nearly 9% of CEOs are minorities, up from less than 2% in 1995.

"This survey will help hospitals focus attention and energy on areas of greatest need for the specific populations served by each hospital," said AHA President and CEO Rich Umbdenstock (AHA News, 6/6; Stempniak, Hospital & Health Networks Daily, 6/6).

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