

▶ FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Hospitals, tell us now



When I first heard, years ago, how many people died each year from infections they got in hospitals, I was astounded. Neither

my surprise nor, unfortunately, the rate has diminished; the current estimate of annual deaths is 99,000.

One of our advocates told me recently that data on those infections is “just a tiny slice of a tiny slice of what we need to know.” The Consumers Union team that works on that issue believes disclosure of infection rates is happening much too slowly. Good luck to anyone looking for information about a particular hospital. (See “Deadly Infections,” on page 16.)

For six years, Consumers Union has led the push for more disclosure so that patients have a way to assess a hospital’s potential to make them sicker than they were when they checked in. Our efforts have paid off; when we started, one state required disclosure. Now 27 do. Of those, 16 have issued public reports. And the awareness of this mostly preventable problem, among the public and those working in health care, has jumped.

But it’s not enough. Not enough states, not enough information, and not enough speed. One problem is that by the time consumers see the analysis of the data, it’s just too old—as much as two years old. That’s a real concern for Consumers Union as we work to deliver information that’s relevant, timely, and in a form that’s truly enlightening to consumers.

Most state reporting laws focus on central-line bloodstream infections that patients get in the intensive-care unit, one of many kinds—the “tiny slice” our advocate mentioned—that can hit patients. Only one state, Pennsylvania, reports on infections in every hospital unit.

Consumers Union’s push for mandatory, validated, public reporting has focused on the state level, where hospitals are regulated and we could effect change. We’ve also been instrumental in the drive for reporting on a national level, because wherever you live, you deserve to have basic safety information about the hospitals that you trust with your life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads “Jim Guest” in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Jim Guest
President