

## Southern Regional recognized for patient efficiency

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In one year - with the help of IQity Solutions LLC, a Pittsburgh, PA-based technology and optimization firm - Southern Regional Medical Center says it has been able to shave more than a day off of the average length of patients' stays.

In two weeks, VHA Georgia, Inc., a statewide network of community hospitals, will recognize Southern Regional for its improvements in patient-care efficiency.

Southern Regional will accept a Leadership Award for Operational Excellence during VHA Georgia's 2009 Leadership Expo, which will take place at the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park on Sept. 2.

According to Pam Vuecker, vice president of member networks and education for VHA Georgia, the organization serves as a support network for 60 not-for-profit hospitals in the state which, collectively, account for 50 percent of the state's hospital admissions. She said Southern Regional's award serves as peer recognition for implementing processes which save money while improving patient care.

"We provide programs, products, and services to help members achieve clinical and economic improvement," Vuecker said. "Each year, VHA Georgia, on a regional level, asks its members to submit [their] best practices. Their application was recognized by peers across the state ... it impressed them and made them feel that they could take that [information] back to their own organizations."

Dr. Willie Cochran, vice president of medical affairs for Southern Regional, said that in October 2008, the hospital implemented its "IQity Through-Put Project." He said the effort to "streamline hospital operations" was started after a 2008 survey of the hospital's Intensive Care Unit (ICU) revealed that the unit needed more bed capacity.

"Because we had a high amount of patients that were in the ICU, with a lot of decreased bed capacity, one of the only ways we would be able to improve that system would be to make the patients flow more efficiently," Cochran said. With the IQity Through-Put Project, "we try make sure that as soon as the patient comes in, we try to think about what needs to be done, so when it is time for discharge ... they don't have to stay in the hospital a day longer than they have to."

Cochran said that through a revamping of the hospital's patient-care procedures, doctors began ordering X-rays, lab work and any other necessary tests, or any nursing home stays, immediately, or soon after, a patient arrives at the hospital. He said since the program was implemented last year, the hospital has seen a 7 percent increase in the number of patient discharges and has not had to divert any patients to other hospitals.

"On average, our patients are in the hospital a little more than four days," Cochran said. "Last year, our average length of stay was much higher. We have been able to reduce that time almost by a day and a half by looking at those processes."

A representative with IQity Solutions, LLC, said the purpose of the "Through-Put Project" was to enable the hospital to "add more patients without adding cost." He said since last year, the hospital has experienced a "complete transformation" in the way it deals with patients.

"They were frequently on ambulance diversion and they had a hard time getting people out the door," the IQity Solutions representative said. "The hospital hasn't had a day of ambulance diversion since we started the program, which is good for the community. The doctors are happier ... the patients are happier. It's one of the situations where everybody looks like a winner."

Vuecker said VHA Georgia's Sept. 2 Leadership Expo will allow Southern Regional to share its processes with other hospitals in the state.

"It's not only to present awards, but it is an opportunity for hospitals to present, so that there can be that information exchange and hospitals around the state can improve some of their best practices," she said. "Community hospitals serve as the safety net of their community. With decreasing federal subsidies, it is more important than ever for community hospitals to be as efficient as possible."