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Statement by
The Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
The Infectious Diseases Society of America and
The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
in response to
The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's
National Healthcare Quality Report

This week, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) released data that presents an outdated and incomplete picture on healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) in our healthcare system. This report confirms the critical need for a national standard for defining and reporting HAIs that ensures validated data that accurately portray infection rates across different geographic regions and categories of risk. Without such a standard, patients and healthcare facilities lack comparable information on rates of infection that can inform their decision-making and improve the quality of care.

We are concerned that any report coming from a government agency based solely on the use of administrative data, commonly referred to as billing/coding data, paints an inaccurate picture of healthcare-associated infections for the public. In contrast, another Department of Health and Human Services agency -- the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) -- is preparing to release epidemiologically sound, surveillance data based on the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN). Multiple studies have concluded that administrative coding data appears to be a poor tool for accurately identifying infections.^{1,2,3} This may create greater confusion among consumers.

Our organizations are leaders in the science and practice of elimination of HAIs and favor transparency and public reporting of infection rates. Innovative research is taking place in academic and practice centers across the country and globally. Much of this research was presented last month at the Fifth Decennial International Conference on Healthcare-Associated Infections (www.decennial2010.com), a gathering of more than 3,300 epidemiologists, infection preventionists, researchers and experts in healthcare epidemiology and infectious disease prevention and control. We are working to highlight this data and continue to encourage the spread of best practices among all healthcare personnel.

Epidemiologists and infection preventionists are identifying and implementing quality and performance measurement systems to support the goal of HAI elimination, providing meaningful data for providers, state health departments, and consumers that can be readily implemented. Our patients require that we work together toward this critical goal.

¹ Sherman E, Heydon K, et al. Administrative Data Fail to Accurately Identify Cases of Healthcare-Associated Infection. *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology* 2006; 27.4: 332-37.

² Stevenson K, Khan Y, Dickman J, et al. Administrative coding data, compared with CDC/NHSN criteria, are poor indicators of health care-associated infections. *American Journal of Infection Control* 2008; 36:155-64.

³ Jhung M, Banerjee, S. Administrative Coding Data and Health Care-Associated Infections. *Healthcare Epidemiology*; 2009; 49:949-55.