

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW Editorial

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Hospital infections: Coming clean

How many more patients must die before Pennsylvania hospitals come clean about their infection rates?

And since the 180 general acute-care facilities have been required to report hospital acquired infections, what could they be hiding and what is the commonwealth doing about it?

These questions speak to an appalling arrogance in the health care industry and an equally appalling inertia in state government.

A 10-month investigation by the Trib in 2003 discovered that hospitals were not required to make their infection rates public or divulge how many were killed by them.

The Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council (PHC4), an independent state agency, had required hospitals to report starting last year. Noncompliance penalties include fines of \$1,000 per day and mandatory audits.

But the council has not penalized *any* hospital. And it refuses to disclose which obey the law, which skirt it, and which ignore it.

The council *still* has not decided what information -- if any -- it will divulge to the state about infection rates, even though Dr. Calvin B. Johnson, secretary of the state Department of Health, is a council board member.

Dr. Johnson -- "the primary public health advocate and spokesman for Pennsylvania" -- must demand *all* information. *Now*. And then *make it public*.

How many more must die before he speaks up?