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altoona hospital  
CENTER FOR MEDICINE

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April 9, 2001

Mr. Marc P. Volavka, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council  
Suite 400, 225 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Mr. Volavka,

The Altoona Hospital welcomes the opportunity to comment on Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council report of C-section Deliveries in Pennsylvania, 1999. We continue to believe that benchmarking our own performance is key to effective action in optimizing the quality of care we provide our patients.

The reported outcomes data demonstrate that Altoona Hospital physicians deliver infants by C-section at a rate almost precisely equal to the statewide average. We note that the Altoona Hospital patient length of stay for vaginal delivery is exactly equal to the statewide average and that the length of stay for C-section is distinctly less than the statewide average. In both categories, the Altoona Hospital average charges are decidedly lower than statewide averages. The Length of Stay and Total Charge outcomes attest to a high level of physician clinical skills.

We do note that the rate for "Vaginal Birth after C-section" is significantly lower than statewide average. From internal data, we have been aware of this pattern and have addressed it with our physicians. Physicians have demonstrated a clear understanding of the risks and benefits of VBAC; and we also know that, when medically appropriate, Altoona Hospital physicians do conscientiously discharge their responsibility to review these issues with their patients. Patient preferences weigh heavily in the final choice of procedure. After careful consideration and through discussion with physicians, we concluded that the Altoona Hospital VBAC variance more accurately reflects local maternal preferences than physician decisions.

In summary, we believe that the various Altoona Hospital C-section rates speak to a very acceptable physician care planning. We also believe that the outcomes achieved in Average Length of Stay and Average Total Charges clearly demonstrate a high level of physician skill in execution of the procedure chosen.

Sincerely,

Robert F. Barnes, M.D.  
Medical Director

Cc: James W. Barner