



A Union of Professionals

AFT Healthcare Policy Statement

POLICY STATEMENT ON JCAHO

While the vast majority of health care attention in this country remains focused on managed care plans and the insurance industry, it is vital that health care quality at the facility level not be overlooked.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) has been given the responsibility of assuring safe quality health care in the nation's hospitals by virtue of its deeming authority for federal health care programs. Unfortunately, because of the influence of the hospital industry on the Joint Commission's practices and finances, JCAHO's survey process is flawed and the agency is unable to ensure a true measurement of hospital quality.

The Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals/AFT believes that JCAHO must make the following five fundamental changes if it is to continue acting on behalf of the government in overseeing hospital quality:

- 1) Triennial surveys must be unannounced so that hospitals will not have time needed to conceal unsafe conditions for workers and patients.
- 2) Workers who speak to JCAHO surveyors must be protected from employer retaliation. In the event that a hospital intimidates or punishes any worker who speaks to JCAHO surveyors in a light unfavorable to the hospital, JCAHO should deny that hospital's accreditation or conduct another unannounced survey at a later date.
- 3) Workers who speak to JCAHO surveyors must be assured confidentiality. The best way to do that is to hold off-site interviews with workers.
- 4) JCAHO must adopt a full public disclosure policy similar to that imposed by Congress on the nursing home industry. This will provide consumers with protection they don't currently receive from JCAHO.
- 5) In institutions where workers are represented by a union, that union should be notified as soon as JCAHO surveyors arrive on-site. A union representative also should be allowed to be present during the actual survey process.

Unless JCAHO adopts these five changes and begins to hold hospitals truly accountable for the quality of care they provide, it should relinquish its deeming authority to state departments of health and act in an advisory role to hospitals only.

- Adopted by the AFT Healthcare Program and Policy Council. October 1995.