HOSPITAL ACCREDITATION

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations’ Relationship with Its Affiliate

What GAO Found

The Joint Commission and JCR have a close relationship as demonstrated through their governance structure and operations. The Joint Commission has substantial control over JCR and the two organizations provide operational services to one another. For example, JCR manages all Joint Commission publications, while the Joint Commission provides support services to JCR. Despite the Joint Commission’s control over JCR, the two organizations have taken steps designed to protect facility-specific information. In 1987, the organizations created a firewall—policies designed to establish a barrier between the organizations to prevent improper sharing of this information. For example, the firewall is intended to prevent JCR from sharing the names of hospital clients with the Joint Commission. Beginning in 2003, both organizations began taking steps intended to strengthen this firewall, such as enhancing monitoring of compliance.

Ensuring the independence of the Joint Commission’s accreditation process is vitally important. To prevent the improper sharing of facility-specific information, it would be prudent for the Joint Commission and JCR to continue to assess the firewall and other related mechanisms.

Relationship between the Joint Commission, JCR, and Hospitals

The Joint Commission agreed with GAO’s concluding observations. CMS did not comment on GAO’s findings or concluding observations. Both provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.