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Health Care Quality Leaders Join Forces

AQA and HQA Collaborate to Expedite National Quality Strategy

WASHINGTON -- Two key health care quality alliances, the AQA alliance and the Hospital Quality Alliance (HQA), have formed a new national Quality Alliance Steering Committee to better coordinate the promotion of quality measurement, transparency and improvement in care. Through the joint efforts of the AQA – an alliance of 135 physician organizations, consumers, employers and health plan representatives that makes available quality information about physician care – and the HQA – a coalition of hospitals, nurses, physician organizations, accrediting agencies, government, consumers and business that shares quality information about key aspects of hospital care – Americans will have helpful information on health care available through the Internet.

The new steering committee will work closely with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), which are key members of both the AQA and HQA.

As a first step, this new steering committee will coordinate and expand several ongoing pilot projects that are designed to combine public and private information to measure and report on performance in a way that is fully transparent and meaningful to all stakeholders.

In March 2006, the AQA alliance announced six pilot projects charged with the responsibility of identifying, collecting and reporting data on the quality of physician performance across care settings. The joint steering committee will explore options for expanding these pilots to include hospital and cost-of-care measures. The committee also will develop a strategy to expand the number of pilots.

The HQA has been providing meaningful and useful information on the quality of heart attack, heart failure and pneumonia care to patients in more than 4,000 of the nation's hospitals since April 2005. In September 2005, the HQA expanded its Web site to include information on prevention of surgical wound infections, and has plans to add many additional aspects of care over the next couple of years.

“This collaborative effort is an important step toward the critical goals of enabling consumers to make more informed health care decisions and supporting improvements in the quality and cost of health care in the United States,” said Dr. Mark McClellan, administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid.

A key responsibility of the steering committee will be to consider how best to expand the scope, speed and adoption of the work of AQA and HQA.

“This new steering committee will help coordinate efforts across a broad spectrum of cross-cutting issues as the two organizations continue working toward a more uniform approach to measuring and reporting hospital and physician performance nationwide,” said Dr. Carolyn Clancy, AHRQ director.

The new joint steering committee comprises physicians, hospitals, consumers, and employers and includes Janet Corrigan, National Quality Forum; Robert Dickler, Association of American Medical Colleges; Karen Ignagni, America's Health Insurance Plans; Chip Kahn, Federation of American Hospitals; Peter Lee, Pacific Business Group on Health; Debra Ness, National Partnership for Women & Families; Nancy Nielsen, American Medical Association; Margaret O'Kane, National Committee for Quality Assurance; Jeff Rich, Society of Thoracic Surgeons; Gerry Shea, AFL- CIO; John Tooker, American College of Physicians; and Rich Umbdenstock, American Hospital Association.

About the AQA Alliance

The AQA alliance is a broad-based national coalition of more than 135 organizations that seeks to improve health care quality through a process in which key stakeholders agree on a strategy for measuring, reporting, and improving performance at the physician level. These 135 organizations represent physicians, consumers, employers, government, health insurance plans, and accrediting and quality organizations. Visit www.aqaalliance.org for further information.

About the Hospital Quality Alliance

The Hospital Quality Alliance (HQA) is a public-private collaboration to improve the quality of care provided by the nation's hospitals by measuring and publicly reporting on that care. The goal of the voluntary program is to collect and report data on a robust set of standardized and easy-to-understand hospital quality measures. The hospital quality information is available on the Web at www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov.