



Defining Quality Key to the Future of Health Care

By Jack Lewin, M.D.

When it comes to health care, “quality” has become the universal answer to the question of how to balance increasing patient access with the need to reduce ever-increasing costs. But what really is “quality”?

At the American College of Cardiology (ACC) we like to define it as an end-to-end systems approach to continuous quality improvement that translates science into practice. We call it “QCARE,” which means Quality Care

to its toolbox, enabling physicians to educate each other, outside stakeholders, and patients on when and how often to perform diagnostic imaging exams.

Our National Cardiovascular Data Registry (NCDR™) is the nation’s premiere quality measurement program for cardiac and vascular facilities and the gold standard for cardiac data collection, reporting and benchmarking. Its suite of benchmarking tools allows facilities to see how they stack up against their peers and gauge where there may be room for improvement.

The ACC is also working with more than 900 hospitals across the country to put guidelines into practice and help save the lives of patients by reducing door-to-balloon times. In addition, we are working with Congress and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to develop quality improvement programs that benefit both patients and practices. On the technology front, the ACC is supporting federal efforts to speed the adoption of health information technology (HIT) — a critical component of measuring quality, performance and efficiency.

However, our job is not done. Increasingly, we must move beyond process measures to focus on outcomes. If we fail to lead in this area, we will face ever increasing government control of health care.

When it comes to the health care system, quality cannot afford to be an afterthought. Rather, it can and must be embedded in everything we do. We have an individual and collective responsibility to provide care that is patient-centered, evidence-based and cost-effective. While it’s not an easy task, it is one that is necessary for the future of health care.

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through Continuous Application of Standards, Reporting and Evaluation.

The ACC is proud of its efforts to bring evidence-based clinical care into everyday practice. We have literally invested millions in QCARE to support education, guidelines, data collection, benchmarking, quality improvement tools and programs, and national standards.

As early as the 1980s, the ACC partnered with the American Heart Association to develop the first clinical practice guidelines that would take the best science and interpret it for everyday practice. In the 1990s, the ACC used the guidelines to lay the groundwork for numerous studies documenting discrepancies between what should be done for cardiovascular patients and what was actually occurring.

Today, the ACC continues its work with other specialty medicine societies to develop and update guidelines and national performance measurement and data standards for both inpatient and outpatient care. Over the last few years, the ACC has added appropriateness criteria

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