

# Clinical Documents: Reducing the Gap Between Science and Practice

by Joseph Drozda, M.D., F.A.C.C.

**P**ayers, lawmakers, physicians and patients continue to search for ways to increase the value of health care. Providing the highest quality of care means practitioners must stay abreast of the latest clinical evidence and best practices for applying these findings. However, even for the most scholarly of practicing physicians, attempting to stay current with the abundance of research available is a daunting task.

Recognizing this, the ACC Foundation (ACCF) offers a series of clinical documents that include guidelines, appropriate use criteria and performance measures to assist physicians in translating clinical research into everyday practice.

## Guidelines

For the last 25 years, the ACCF has partnered with the American Heart Association (AHA) to create clinical practice guidelines to assist physicians in providing the highest quality of care. These guidelines carefully synthesize available evidence to assist physicians in clinical decision-making by recommending a range of generally acceptable approaches for the diagnosis, management or prevention of specific diseases or conditions.

Guidelines are based primarily on a review of clinical trial results combined with expert opinion. While recommendations are written for typical patient settings, guidelines still require clinical judgment to be adapted to the care of individual patients. Currently, the ACCF and AHA spend more than a million dollars a year to support development and updates to more than 2,800 recommendations in 18 published guidelines.

## Appropriate Use Criteria

Appropriate use criteria, formerly appropriateness criteria, define “when to do” and “how often to do” a given procedure in the context of scientific evidence, the health care environ-

ment, the patient’s profile and a physician’s judgment. Appropriate use criteria provide practical tools to measure variability in cardiovascular procedures and to look at use patterns. The criteria support an efficient use of medical resources, while providing quality, appropriate care.

Because of their patient-centered approach, it is hoped that appropriate use criteria will be used to guide future research and lead to patient education. In addition, physicians, payers and medical facilities can use the criteria to assess practice patterns, design ordering protocols and/or provide the basis for quality improvement activities.

## Performance Measures

Performance measures, also completed in partnership with AHA, are specific clinical measures that indicate evidence-based care for physicians. They capture aspects of care recommended in ACCF/AHA guidelines that are proven to improve patient outcomes and that can be measured in valid, actionable and feasible ways.

Performance measures will play a crucial role as state- and federal-level efforts to measure quality and publicly report outcomes expand. Because they involve physicians from the outset of the process, performance measures improve the accuracy of what constitutes “quality” cardiovascular care.

For more information about guidelines, performance measures, appropriate use criteria and other clinical

documents, visit [www.acc.org](http://www.acc.org) and click on “Quality and Science” then “Clinical documents.”

**Drozda is chair of ACC’s Clinical Quality Committee.**

