

AQA BACKGROUND: IMPROVING CLINICAL QUALITY AND CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

The AQA (formerly known as the Ambulatory Care Quality Alliance) was founded in the fall of 2004 by the American College of Physicians (ACP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The AQA has grown since that time into a broad based collaborative of over 100 organizations, including physicians and other clinicians, consumers, purchasers, health insurance plans and others.

The current mission of the AQA is to:

improve patient safety, health care quality and value in all settings through a collaborative process in which key stakeholders agree on and promote strategies to:

- *implement performance measurement at the physician and other clinician or group level;*
- *collect and aggregate data in the most appropriate way; and*
- *report meaningful information to consumers, physicians and other clinicians, and other stakeholders to inform decision-making and improve outcomes.*

The AQA's goals have historically focused on reaching consensus on:

- A set of measures for assessing physician and other clinician performance that stakeholders can use in private health insurance plan efforts and with government purchaser programs;
- A multi-year strategy to roll-out additional measurement sets and implement measures into the marketplace;
- A model (including framework and governing structure) for aggregating, sharing and stewarding data; and
- Critical steps needed for reporting useful information to providers, consumers and purchasers.

AQA's mission and goals focus on key areas that can help identify quality gaps, control skyrocketing cost trends, reduce confusion over redundant measures and alleviate administrative burdens in the marketplace.

Accomplishments

The AQA has demonstrated the ability to reach multi-stakeholder consensus on clinician level measures recommended for implementation into public and private programs. The AQA has met crucial deadlines for reviewing and approving measures through a transparent consensus process which resulted in additional measures being available for public use in the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI). The AQA continues to offer guidance on the implementation of measures by providing a forum to discuss lessons from measure implementers, data aggregation projects, and public and private reporting initiatives. AQA also has produced a number of foundational documents that guide and lead use of measures for quality improvement and reporting. These include the *Data Sharing and Aggregation Principles for Performance*

Measurement and Reporting, Principles for Public Reports and Reporting to Clinicians and Hospitals, Parameters for Selecting Measures for Physician and Other Clinician Performance, and Principles of Efficiency Measures. In addition, the AQA was instrumental in calling for regional data sharing and aggregation pilots, implemented as the CMS Better Quality Information to Improve Quality for Medicare Beneficiaries (BQI) special project.

Health Care Reform and The Evolution of AQA

Despite progress in quality measurement and improvement, gaps in care and effective measures remain. Physicians and other clinicians strive to deliver high quality care. They continue to seek meaningful information to use in improving care, strategies and tools to drive improvement efforts, and alignment across public and private sectors to focus use of limited resources. The passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) has heightened urgency to assess quality, improve care and address unsustainable costs. Many different private and public sector groups have attempted to step up to the challenge by designing models for assessing performance and reporting data. While progress has been made, the proliferation of multiple, uncoordinated and sometimes conflicting initiatives has significant unintended consequences for different stakeholders. For example, duplicative efforts:

- Unnecessarily burden physicians, other clinicians, and health insurance plans with different data requests, shifting focus away from quality and efficiency improvement;
- Create confusion among consumers because different information is being publicly reported; and
- Detract from efforts by employers to design programs that meet the needs of their employees.

Perhaps most important, however, are the adverse effects numerous initiatives have on patient care and the health care system as a whole. The PPACA contains many provisions related to quality, highlighting the need for stakeholders to figure out how to transform the system from one that rewards volume to one that rewards quality.

The AQA's key asset is the broad representation of stakeholders and the forum in which members convene to share information, identify and promote best practices, and reach consensus on strategies for use of measures in improving payment and delivery systems. With the passage of comprehensive health care reform, alliances such as AQA have become even more relevant and necessary to inform and guide new public and private initiatives that will reshape the U.S. health care system.

As outlined in the AQA's Strategic Plan approved in October 2010, the AQA plans to play the following future roles:

- Convener to promote and facilitate alignment among the public and private sector efforts.
- Promoter of "best practice" quality improvement strategies to address the gap between measurement and improvement.
- Provider of guidance to the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) as it implements health care reform initiatives.

The AQA Steering Committee continues to value the diverse perspectives of all participating stakeholder groups. As AQA implements its strategic plan, the steering group, the workgroup chairs and supporting organizations – those groups whose work feeds into the work of AQA -- will be encouraging other stakeholders to play leading roles in AQA's efforts, welcoming new members to the workgroups, and considering the work of other initiatives to further the mission of AQA.