Building Health Care Value By Changing How We Deliver Care

America's doctors, nurses and other health professionals want to deliver the best quality care possible. Unfortunately, that can be a challenge because our current health care system is inefficient and outdated. Doctors, hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and other health care providers across the country are finding new, better ways to deliver health care. We need to encourage more providers to adopt the ‘best practices’ that we know improve patient outcomes, ensure better quality of care, and lower health care costs.

One Health System’s Success: Kaiser Permanente Northern California’s Healthy Heart Program

Kaiser Permanente is an integrated health care system in northern California serving more than 3.2 million members. Recently, Kaiser Permanente adopted an evidence-based prevention and treatment program for members with cardiovascular disease. Under the program:

- Physicians and clinicians rigorously screen all patients for cardiovascular disease using clearly defined guidelines, ensuring all patients who need targeted care receive it.
- Patients follow specially-designed, evidence-based cardiovascular disease prevention and management plans. Secondary cardiovascular risks, such as diabetes, are carefully factored into these plans.
- The results are dramatic: Participating patients have a 30 percent lower risk of dying from heart disease than the general public.

We know how to deliver better, more effective care. We can improve health care and patient outcomes – as well as lower costs – when we focus care on prevention, coordinating the care of chronically ill patients, and intervening intensively when necessary.

The Right Care at the Right Time in the Right Setting

Health care is frequently delivered today using the same methods and systems as were used years ago. By reexamining how providers can better work together and how teams of providers can work with patients, we can increase the quality of care, lower costs and improve health outcomes. Examples of how care can be redesigned include:

- Better coordination of hospital care: By teaming up physicians to coordinate care for hospitalized patients, we can reduce mortality and length of stay by more than 10 percent.
- Effectively use medical professionals: In the doctor’s office or other outpatient settings, we can use a wider variety of medical professionals more effectively, such as having nurse practitioners and physician assistants deliver more primary care.
- Encourage electronic prescriptions with active decision support: New technology can help alert physicians to what prescription drugs are covered by a patient’s health insurance, if a new prescription poses a potential risk in interacting with medications the patient is already taking, or if there are new medications or treatment guidelines for the patients’ condition. Having automatic access to this type of information through electronic prescription systems can help protect patients against medical errors and reduce health care spending.
- Providing a “medical home”: Through information technology, we can create electronic medical histories and records that easily travel with patients if they change health plans or care providers.
What’s Needed? Redesigning Health Care Delivery

We need a system that modernizes how care is delivered to ensure that care is patient-centered and efficient, focuses on prevention, avoids unnecessary high-technology interventions, and maximizes all health professionals to their fullest capacity and level of expertise.

Where to Start?

There are real solutions that can begin to address the need to improve how we deliver care for patients. Some examples include:

■ At every level of our health care system, ensure the right care is offered by the most appropriate provider, especially at the preventive and primary care levels. This means using teams of doctors, nurses, physician therapists, nutritionists, and others to coordinate and manage patient care, especially for the chronically ill.
■ Employ information technology to analyze and track patient health and provider performance, and then publicly report that information to support quality improvement initiatives.
■ Encourage physicians to look at the whole health care picture for patients, not just at a patient’s office visit.
■ Ensure improvements in how care is delivered are appropriately compensated.

About Building Health Care Value

As the debate on how best to reform our broken health care system continues, many can agree that the current system covers too few, costs too much, and does not deliver consistently high-quality care. This document is part of a series seeking to focus our discussion on how to ensure patients receive quality, affordable care. Without ensuring quality, access to care may be meaningless. Without addressing costs, care becomes inaccessible. By building health care value into reform measures, we can ensure that Americans get the right care at the right time.

Where to Learn More:

■ "Measure, Learn and Improve: Physician’s Involvement in Quality Improvement.” Health Affairs, 2005.

The Consumer-Purchaser Disclosure Project is an initiative that is improving health care quality and affordability by advancing public reporting of provider performance information so it can be used for improvement, consumer choice, and as part of payment reform. The Project is a collaboration of leading national and local employer, consumer, and labor organizations whose shared vision is for Americans to be able to select hospitals, physicians, and treatments based on nationally standardized measures for clinical quality, consumer experience, equity, and efficiency. The Disclosure Project is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation along with support from participating organizations. For more information contact questions@healthcaredisclosure.org or visit our website at http://healthcaredisclosure.org/.