Providing patient care that is safe and of the highest possible quality is a central goal of every practicing physician. That is why matters of quality are also of utmost importance to the American Medical Association (AMA). The AMA began convening the Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement®, also known as the Consortium, in 2000. The Consortium is committed to improving the quality of care and patient safety by taking the lead in the development, testing, and maintenance of evidence-based clinical performance measures and measurement resources for physicians. These are not guidelines created by an insurance company, not best practices developed by some unknown panel and not efficiency measures created by third party payers. Rather, these are a national source of scientific, evidence-based measures developed by the profession: by physicians, for physicians, for the patients we serve.

The Consortium is comprised of more than 100 national medical specialty and state medical societies, including the Wisconsin Medical Society (Society). Also included are the American Board of Medical Specialties and its constituent boards, the Council of Medical Specialty Societies and its member specialty organizations, the US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The Consortium assures that physicians will be at the table in the many national forums now seeking to evaluate the quality of patient care. The concepts of performance improvement are being introduced into all phases of medical education and experience—from medical school, through residency, and into continuing medical education.

The collaborative work undertaken by the Consortium brings physicians and other stakeholders together to improve patient health and safety by

- Identifying and developing evidence-based clinical performance measures that enhance quality of patient care and foster accountability.
- Promoting the implementation of scientifically valid and clinically relevant performance improvement activities.

Physicians need to have evidence-based clinical performance measures at their fingertips, as well as an efficient means of collecting and reporting data, so we can monitor, improve, and demonstrate the quality of care we provide to our patients.

As of late 2006, the Consortium has developed 151 performance measures. Complete clinical and technical specifications are available for a number of common conditions such as asthma, heart failure, major depressive disorder, and osteoarthritis. We are working to have the measures integrated into many electronic health records systems to make them easy for physicians to implement, but there are other ways, using paper records, to apply the measures as well. We encourage physicians to review the measures at www.physicianconsortium.org. We hope that physicians will choose one (or more) of the measures applicable to their patient population and measure their performance.

Health care quality improvement has been chosen as the presidential theme for the Society this year. Society President Bradley Manning, MD, likens the provision of quality care to assembling a puzzle.

“Health care professionals must have complete and accurate information available to assist them in making the right decisions for their patients,” Dr. Manning said. “And with complete and timely patient information, we will create better opportunities for better decisions and better patient care.”

I couldn’t agree with Dr Manning more. As he mentions, we live in an age of information and technology, with the opportunity to improve the practice of medicine. We all want to provide our patients with the right interventions at the right time each and every time. Using the Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement® as a national source of well-vetted scientific measures is one way of ensuring we do that.

If you do not yet belong, I urge you to join your county medical society, the Wisconsin Medical Society and the AMA. Through our professional organizations, we can raise our voice on behalf of physicians and patients and step up our efforts in patient safety and quality.
The mission of the Wisconsin Medical Journal is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

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