**Focus on . . . Empowering the Patient**

**Aligning forces for quality: The Wisconsin way**

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**Introduction**

Wisconsin is a leader in fostering partnerships to improve health care quality. Great strides can be made when physicians, nurses, patients, consumers, community leaders, employers, and insurers work together in collaborative efforts. No single group or profession can improve health care without the support of others. Collaborative approaches help health care professionals deliver better care and patients make better choices.

Earlier this year, Wisconsin was recognized as a pioneer in improving health care quality and awarded a prestigious 3-year grant from Aligning Forces for Quality, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The grant is designed to help improve the quality of the care provided for chronic diseases in ambulatory settings.

The Aligning Forces for Quality initiative focuses on 3 complementary strategies to advance the quality of chronic care provided in physicians’ offices, clinics, and other outpatient settings:

1. Help health care professionals measure and publicly report their performance
2. Help health care professionals improve their own ability to deliver quality care
3. Help patients and consumers understand their role in recognizing high-quality health care

Aligning Forces for Quality is operating in 14 communities across the country. In addition to Wisconsin, the selected communities include Cincinnati, Ohio; Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Mich; Humboldt County, Calif; Kansas City, Mo; Maine; Memphis, Tenn; Minn; Seattle, Wash; Western Michigan; Western New York; Willamette Valley, Ore; and York, Penn. The communities were selected with the guidance of national experts and after intensive site visits confirmed the community had already taken significant steps toward the initiative’s goals and had the capacity for further improvement.

**Harnessing Local Forces**

The Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ) serves as the lead organization for the Aligning Forces for Quality initiative in Wisconsin. The initiative leverages the WCHQ’s established infrastructure for performance measurement and improvement while introducing new activities to strengthen and elevate a focus on patient empowerment and consumer engagement. The initiative also builds on existing synergies and fosters genuine partnerships for creating an improved health care system.

The WCHQ has assembled a diverse and talented leadership team to provide oversight for the project. The team represents key stakeholders, including organizations with extensive experience in assisting health care consumers through advocacy, education, and research efforts. The leadership organizations include the Business Health Care Group, Center for Patient Partnerships, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, HOPE

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About the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality

The Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality is a voluntary consortium of organizations learning and working together to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of health care by developing and publicly reporting comparative measures of health care performance.

Its membership includes health care systems, physician groups, hospitals and health plans throughout Wisconsin—representing approximately 40% of Wisconsin’s licensed/practicing physicians and approximately 50% of the state’s primary care physicians.

For more information about the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality or Aligning Forces for Quality, please visit http://www.wchq.org or contact Cindy Schlough (608.250.1598; cschlough@wchq.org).
Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality Member Organizations

Advanced Healthcare, Milwaukee
Affinity Health System, Oshkosh
Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac
Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Wausau
Aurora Health Care, Milwaukee
Bellin Health, Green Bay
Columbia St. Mary’s, Milwaukee
Dean Health System, Madison
Franciscan Skemp Healthcare, La Crosse
Froedtert & Community Health, Milwaukee
Gundersen Lutheran, La Crosse
Lakeshore Medical Clinic, Milwaukee
Luther Mideffort-Mayo Health System, Eau Claire
Marshfield Clinic & Security Health Plan, Marshfield
Medical Associates Health Centers, Menomonee Falls
Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Mercy Health System, Janesville
Meriter Hospital & Physicians Plus Insurance Corporation, Madison
Prevea Health, Green Bay
ProHealth Care, Waukesha
Sacred Heart Hospital, Eau Claire
Saint Joseph’s Hospital, Marshfield
St. Mary’s Hospital, Madison
St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, Green Bay
SynergyHealth West Bend Clinic, West Bend
ThedaCare, Appleton
University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics & Unity Health Insurance, Madison
University of Wisconsin Medical Foundation, Madison
Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare, Milwaukee and Racine

Business and Labor Partners

City of Appleton
Badger Meter, Inc.
Business Health Care Group
Chrysler Corporation
Employer Health Care Alliance Cooperative (The Alliance)
GE Healthcare
Greater Milwaukee Business Foundation on Health, Inc.
Schneider National
Sentry Insurance
Serigraph, Inc.
The Trane Company
Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce

of Wisconsin, Medical College of Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Medical Foundation, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality, Wisconsin Health Project, Wisconsin Hospital Association, and Wisconsin Medical Society.

Measuring, Reporting, and Improving Performance

The Aligning Forces for Quality initiative capitalizes on WCHQ’s existing measurement, reporting, and improvement efforts. Its members have been persistently working on the goals of transparency and quality improvement over the last few years, as illustrated by these accomplishments:

- Ambulatory quality of care measures and comparative performance results, first released in 2005. The ambulatory care measures include postpartum care, uncomplicated essential hypertension, and diabetes. The diabetes measures include blood sugar (A1c) testing and control, LDL cholesterol testing and control, and kidney function monitoring.

- Preventive care measures and comparative performance results, first released in 2006. The preventive care measures include breast cancer screening, cervical cancer screening, and colorectal screening.

- The existing performance measures are continually updated and new measures are under development. The member organizations are currently developing 2 new measures. These will address coronary artery disease and pneumococcal vaccination.

- The member organizations use the measurement and reporting activities as the foundation for identifying opportunities for quality improvement and knowledge transfer. For example, members of the Cardiac Collaborative have reduced the time from when a patient with a heart attack enters the hospital and receives care in the catheter lab by working with and learning from fellow members who have achieved higher levels of performance.

Empowering Patients and Engaging Consumers

Patients and consumers are at the heart of the Aligning Forces for Quality initiative. They are expected to take an active, engaged role in their own care and
in improving the quality of health care in their community. Aligning Forces for Quality includes a broad range of patient and consumer activities, from helping them better understand their own conditions and available treatments, to seeking out and making decisions based on information about the performance of health care professionals.

The WCHQ has convened a Consumer Workgroup to develop a rich and comprehensive set of strategies aimed at patient empowerment and consumer engagement. The workgroup is comprised of representatives from health care professional organizations, employers and business coalitions, state agencies, and consumer advocates—with expertise and interest in working with chronic diseases as well as disadvantaged populations and the elderly.

A major priority for the Consumer Workgroup has been development of the “stakeholder framework” and associated behavioral targets that are required as part of the Aligning Forces for Quality initiative. The stakeholder framework has resulted in the Medicaid population as the focal point for the initial work on consumer engagement. As a result of this focus, the senior leadership of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services has become involved in the project and is helping develop the action plan for its implementation.

The goal of Aligning Forces for Quality is for patients to receive the appropriate care at the appropriate time and place with the appropriate combination of information and supporting resources. The Consumer Workgroup is receiving technical assistance to support its efforts, which include conducting direct research with Medicaid patients in selected markets in Wisconsin and developing communication tools based on the needs and stated preferences of this population. The Workgroup also has extensive access to educational webinars and national research findings as well as interactive in-person meetings with abundant opportunities to learn from communities across the country that are also creating innovations to improve their local health care system.

**Summary**

Aligning Forces for Quality offers a tremendous opportunity for Wisconsin’s health care stakeholders to work together to advance the quality of chronic care. Wisconsin is well-poised to work collaboratively on this initiative, has already taken significant initial steps toward its aims, and has the capacity for further improvement. Together we can make a difference by aligning the forces for quality the Wisconsin way.

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