Health systems and hospitals are challenged to evaluate the quality of care provided to their patients by reviewing the gap between recommended and actual practice. Internal quality efforts usually include medical peer review processes. Internal peer review may assess a health care professional's overall practice patterns or a specific case review with an adverse outcome. A hospital's internal peer review policy also may include the option for external peer review.

External peer review may be indicated under the following circumstances:

- In the event of an adverse outcome, a hospital or health system wants to determine that appropriate care was provided.
- There are concerns about a practitioner's pattern of care; for example, where a practitioner has a disproportionate number of adverse outcomes.
- A hospital or health system does not have a same-specialty peer to provide a peer review.
- There are concerns that the relationship of available peers with the physician under review could impair those peers' objectivity.
- A hospital or health system wishes to validate its internal peer review process and findings.

Organizations like MetaStar provide board-certified peer reviewers from a broad range of specialties to match the health care professional being reviewed. The peer reviewer attests that no conflict of interest exists with regard to the hospital, the patient, or the practitioner. The hospital provides the medical record(s) for review. The external peer reviewer applies professionally recognized standards of care and guidelines to evaluate the quality of the care provided.

In addition, a utilization review may be performed to determine whether the services provided to a patient were, or proposed services are, medically necessary and provided at the appropriate level of care.

For both quality and utilization reviews, a report is submitted to the hospital, including a case summary and a summary of the expert opinion addressing the appropriateness of the care provided.

An objective, external peer review is a cost-effective tool available to health systems and hospitals to evaluate and to ensure the quality of care provided to their patients.

This material was prepared by MetaStar, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Wisconsin, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents presented do not necessarily reflect CMS policy. 105OW-WI-CRSP-14-02.

Dr. Gold is senior vice president and chief medical officer for MetaStar; Ms. Brandt is MetaStar’s vice president of review services and performance measurement.

Physical activity is a great way for kids to build strength and stay healthy. Unfortunately, it can sometimes lead to injury. Broken bones require immediate attention, but what about sore shoulders or swollen knees? If not taken seriously, many youth injuries can become chronic later in life. So before your child gets hurt, visit aaos.org or nata.org. Practice prevention and give all injuries proper attention.
The mission of *WMJ* is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education for Midwest physicians and other health professionals.

*WMJ* (ISSN 1098-1861) is published by the Wisconsin Medical Society and is devoted to the interests of the medical profession and health care in the Midwest. The managing editor is responsible for overseeing the production, business operation and contents of the *WMJ*. The editorial board, chaired by the medical editor, solicits and peer reviews all scientific articles; it does not screen public health, socioeconmic, or organizational articles. Although letters to the editor are reviewed by the medical editor, all signed expressions of opinion belong to the author(s) for which neither *WMJ* nor the Wisconsin Medical Society take responsibility. *WMJ* is indexed in Index Medicus, Hospital Literature Index, and Cambridge Scientific Abstracts.

For reprints of this article, contact the *WMJ* at 866.442.3800 or e-mail wmj@wismed.org.

© 2014 Wisconsin Medical Society