

Study Shows Consumer Acceptance of Online Health Care Quality Data

Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Alliance Upgrades, Expands Web Site

(October 22, 2008 PHILADELPHIA, PA) A survey of more than 800 Pennsylvanians finds growing awareness and use of hospital quality reporting web sites. Results of the survey, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Alliance (PHCQA), were made public today as part of an announced upgrade and expansion of the PHCQA web site. The site compiles hospital quality data in a searchable format that allows consumers to see and compare hospital performance in a variety of quality measures. The web site name has been changed to PAHealthCareQuality.org.

The Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Alliance is an association of the Commonwealth's hospitals, its four Blue plans, the Pennsylvania Medical Society, government policy makers, and other organizations concerned with promoting quality and transparency in health care. PHCQA debuted its site last March, and since then has worked to upgrade and expand the site's content.

“As part of our ongoing effort to improve PAHealthCareQuality.org, we sponsored a research study to gauge consumers' awareness and attitudes towards hospital quality data,” said Erik Muther, Executive Director of PHCQA. “Our research shows that while most respondents believe quality varies from hospital to hospital, over 40 percent indicated that they are unsure of where to find information to help them with their decision-making. Doctor recommendations remain the most influential factor in hospital selection, but at least a third of our respondents said they did use hospital quality data to help them decide where to go for care.”

The survey was conducted among randomly selected Pennsylvanians via both an online and telephone survey during late August and early September of this year.

Among the study's key findings:

- About one-third of respondents indicated that they had used hospital quality data in making decisions about where to go for care.
- Over three-quarters of survey respondents agreed that they need to “take active steps to avoid poor quality medical care.”
- Between 50 and 75 percent believe that hospitals can differ in terms of their quality.

The survey also asked respondents to provide feedback on the PHCQA web site. About three-quarters said the site was either “much easier” or “somewhat easier” to use than they anticipated.

“The average person may feel reluctant to seek out hospital quality data, fearing that it will be complex or difficult to understand,” explained Gerald Miller, chairman of the Alliance. “We have designed the report to be as easy as possible to use. Our goal is to provide information that people can understand—and more importantly, trust. The information we make available represents the consensus of providers, insurers, and regulators about which measures best indicate hospital quality in the respective clinical areas.”

In addition to updated hospital quality measures for heart attack, heart failure, pneumonia, and infection prevention, the upgraded web site has added the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey responses, which are patient experience measures; and Appropriate Care Measures (ACM), which are voluntarily reported measures that indicate the percent of patients who received all of the recommended care for their respective conditions. “Hospitals volunteered to share these new measures publicly, a testament to Pennsylvania hospitals and health systems commitment to be accountable to the patients and communities they serve, and to continual quality improvement,” said Carolyn F. Scanlan, President and Chief Executive Officer of The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP). The PHCQA partnered with Quality Insights of Pennsylvania, the state’s quality improvement organization, to extract the ACM measures from publicly reported data. “The addition of the Appropriate Care Measures to the updated website provides consumer-friendly data, endorsed by leading hospital quality organizations that will help those who use the Alliance’s website to better understand how hospitals are doing in providing necessary care for patients.”

“We believe the model of consensus and collaboration established by PHCQA offers Pennsylvania consumers a trustworthy and accurate source of information,” said Dr. I. Steven Udvarhelyi, chief medical officer for Independence Blue Cross. “We are very proud of the significant progress that PHCQA has made over a short period of time in providing patients more and better hospital quality information, and we wholeheartedly support these efforts.”

Beyond helping consumers, the work of the Alliance in building consensus about quality measures has proven beneficial to insurers and providers in establishing “pay for performance” arrangements. For example, in their recent agreement, Independence Blue Cross and the Jefferson Health System in Philadelphia used nearly all of the PHCQA process measures to set performance-based incentive compensation to JHS hospitals for the delivery of high quality care.

Since its debut last March, the PHCQA website has had over 25,000 visitors. “There has been a steady flow of visitors to the website every day and we believe traffic will increase as the public becomes more aware of the website’s content,” Mr. Muther said. “Although patients continue to rely mainly on their physicians, friends, and personal experience in choosing a hospital, we are convinced that websites like PAHealthCareQuality.org

will continue to gain greater awareness and acceptance over time. The march toward making this information readily available—and toward consumers using it regularly—is inevitable.”

The Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Alliance formed in 2006. Alliance members include The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP), which represents more than 225 hospitals and health systems across the state; the Delaware Valley Healthcare Council of HAP; the Hospital Council of Western Pennsylvania; the state’s four Blue plans (Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Capital BlueCross, Highmark Inc., and Independence Blue Cross); the Pennsylvania Medical Society; and representatives from the Governor’s Office of Health Care Reform and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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