

Five Things to Keep in Mind when Using Information **on the Quality of Local Doctors or Hospitals**

These days, people can get ratings on almost anything—from cars to toasters. But what about health care? In many regions of the country, objective, factual information is publicly available on the quality of care provided by local doctors, hospitals, and health plans. This information, which is available online, helps doctors and hospitals see how they are doing. It also helps people make informed choices about their care. When reviewing information on the quality of local health care providers:

- 1 Remember quality ratings are just one piece of the puzzle.** You need to take many things into account when choosing a doctor or hospital. Comparative information on quality can tell you how a hospital or group of doctors performs in key areas related to your health conditions. Remember, though, that this information cannot predict your own outcome. All it can do is help you understand more about the care you get.
- 2 Ask questions.** If you look at information about the quality of care provided by your doctor or hospital and you have questions, be sure to ask them. They are on your team. They are the best source of information about your care.
- 3 Know what you're looking at.** Information on quality of health care comes from different sources, but generally does one of four things: it combines patients' opinions about the care they received at a specific doctor's office or hospital (called patient experience data or measures); it shows the actual care provided to a patient, which reveals how many patients got the right care from a doctor or hospital, based on the latest scientific evidence about what should have happened (called process data or measures); it shows how a doctor's or hospital's patients fared over time on meeting specific health goals (called outcome data or measures); or it explains and compares the typical cost of care for a specific service at a doctor's office or hospital (called cost data or measures).
- 4 Know where to look.** Several organizations collect information on the quality of local health care providers and assign scores and rankings, including the [federal government](#) and local groups working to improve health care, which may provide some of the most detailed reports. A compilation of reports is available at [Comparing Health Care Quality: A National Directory](#).
- 5 Think locally.** Information compiled by local groups is likely to include information on the quality of care delivered by doctors and hospitals near where you live. This information can help you choose a doctor's office or clinic that provides the best care for you and your family.

