

Facts About Ambulatory Quality Improvement

In our health care system, patients receive outpatient, or ambulatory, care at their primary doctor's office and clinics—and inpatient care at hospitals. Typically, patients look to their primary physician to help them stay well and avoid the need for emergency care. As the health care system and Americans' overall health has altered, the need to focus on improving the quality of care in these primary settings has become more urgent.

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American health care faces a quality crisis. There is a dangerous divide between the high-quality care our health care system is capable of delivering and the uneven-quality care that it is actually providing. People are not getting care they desperately need.

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In every community, doctors' offices deliver both good health care and bad health care. There are too many mistakes, too much miscommunication and too much inequity. We can do better, and we must.

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Everyone who gets care, gives care and pays for care must work together. First, we must understand the quality of care that is being delivered in every community by measuring and reporting on the performance of doctors. Then we must implement strategies to help them improve quality. Finally, we must encourage people to act like consumers when it comes to health care to build demand for high-quality care, and we must encourage patients to become better partners with their doctors in managing their own health care.

4

Patients need to get involved. Some health care delivery systems are better at supporting patients in self-management activities than others. Those that focus on the patient—such as practices built on the “medical home” model, or those that use the Chronic Care Model—do best because they can offer coordinated and customized care aimed specifically at activating patients.

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Care settings that are redesigned to encourage medical providers to work in teams, making better use of physician assistants, nurses, nutritionists and dietitians, seem to be the most successful in providing high-quality care, engaging patients and ultimately improving health outcomes.

