Choosing a Health Care Provider: The Role of Quality Information

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Presentation based on a Research Synthesis by Harris and Melinda Beeuwkes Buntin, Ph.D.

Synthesis Report and Brief Available at www.policysynthesis.org
Why is this issue important to policymakers?

- There is a growing interest in using consumer demand to improve health care quality
- Disseminating information about provider quality may
  - Lead consumers to choose higher quality providers
  - Prompt low quality providers to improve
- The potential of information is greatest if
  - Understandable
  - Relevant
The Synthesis focuses on five questions

- What information is available?
- Is the information adequate?
- Are consumers aware of the information?
- Do consumers use the information?
- Has the availability of information led to more effective provider choices?
What quality information is available to consumers?

- Hospital quality information is widely available
  - Clinical performance
  - Inpatient mortality, sometimes at the surgeon-level
  - Surveys of patient satisfaction and physician opinion

- Physician quality information is very limited – *Despite strong consumer interest*
  - Surveys of patient satisfaction and physician opinion
  - Voluntary certification

- CDHPs have not meaningful increased the availability of information
Is the information adequate?

- Public reporting strives to be relevant and user-friendly

- Content is either
  - Evidence-based and difficult to navigate
  - Easy-to-understand and of uncertain validity

- Most information is disseminated via the internet
  - Keeps costs low
  - Provides opportunities for customization
  - Raises concerns about accessibility
Are consumers aware of publicly available quality information?

- Less than a quarter of consumers recalled seeing information on hospital or physician quality

Percent of Americans reporting having seen quality information on providers

Source: KFF/AHRQ

- Awareness appears higher among the healthy, wealthy, and better educated
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Do consumers use quality information?

- Use appears very low — *Less than 25% of those aware of information used it*

- Lack of use stems from a lack of relevance – not a *perceived* lack of understanding

**Reasons given for not using hospital quality information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No need to make hospital decisions</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information not specific to personal health conditions</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors other than quality were more important</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information did not include a specific hospital</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information was confusing or difficult to understand</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: KFF/AHRQ, 2004

- *Existing studies may paint an overly pessimistic picture by not identifying “choice ready” consumers*
Has publicly available information led to more effective provider choices?

- No direct evidence answers this question

- In one study linked information to consumers’ ability to identify high-quality providers

- Information is associated with
  - Shifts away from low performers
  - Improved quality among low performers

-- *However, role of individual consumers is unclear*
Conclusions and Implications

- Despite ongoing efforts, public reporting does not meet consumer needs
  - Needed: Accessible presentation of technical information
  - Needed: Physician quality measures

- Reliance on internet may limit awareness and access
  - Needed: Reach beyond the “digital divide”

- Questions about the potential of public reporting remain unanswered
  - Needed: Stronger methodologies, including experiments
Project Information

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