What We’re Learning:  
**How to Report on the Quality of Physician Practices**

**The Challenge**

Publicly reporting on the quality of health care serves three important purposes. It enables:

- Patients to make informed choices about their care and be better partners with their doctors.
- Health care professionals to see where they can improve their performance.
- Consumers and purchasers to see the quality of services they are getting for their money.

As part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) initiative, 16 alliances across the country have published public reports about the quality of care local physicians provide—reports that everyone who gets, gives, or pays for care can use. The content of these reports has varied. Some rely on insurance claims data, others use metadata taken directly from physicians’ medical records, and several directly survey patients to ask how they experienced care.

Many alliances overcame initial resistance from local physicians to performance measurement. Alliances have also encountered difficulty getting consumers to use their reports.

However, there is substantial evidence that providers are using performance data to improve their care. Alliances are also learning how to make their reports more consumer friendly.

**The Facts**

Public reporting of performance measurement data is growing. More than 200 websites provide information about local health care providers.

Initiatives to publicly report performance data are popping up across the country. Every state except for Alaska, Idaho, and the District of Columbia has at least one public report on the quality or cost of care provided by hospitals or physicians.

**What’s Working**

Reporting about the quality of health care can be controversial, especially when reporting poor performance. Most alliances sought to get all necessary stakeholders on board from the outset, including physicians, health plans, data experts, purchasers, and consumers. Without stakeholder buy-in, it is difficult to launch and sustain a public reporting program.

Physicians have mixed feelings about performance reporting. When working with Consumers Union to publish a special insert in *Consumer Reports*, Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP), which leads
the state’s AF4Q efforts, found that some physicians were uneasy with being rated, and felt that the practice of medicine cannot be compared and rated like common household appliances. Other physicians countered this concern by noting that transparency is here to stay. In an effort to get the physician community’s seal of approval, many AF4Q communities develop private reports for physicians, medical group administrators, and clinic managers to review before sharing the data publicly.

Oregon Health Care Quality Corporation (Q Corp), which leads the state’s AF4Q efforts, put together a measurement and reporting committee comprised of consumers, providers, employers, policymakers, and health insurers. The committee identifies and makes recommendations to Q Corp’s board of directors on principles for measure selection and public reporting criteria.

When launching its efforts to measure the D5—a composite measure of five select treatment goals for managing diabetes—Minnesota Community Measurement, which leads the AF4Q effort in Minnesota, brought together physicians, medical group representatives, health plan leaders, and associations in a pilot program to build consensus on the initial set of measures and methodologies to be used. After the initial launch, these groups were also consulted on the evolution of measures.

**FAST FACT:** A study of 567 health care practices in Wisconsin showed that participation in public reporting correlated with improved performance.¹

Sound data is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to publicly reporting performance information. Data must be presented in a clear and actionable way to increase usability for both consumers and physicians. Content should present the meaning and importance of specific measures, in addition to guidance on how to use the data to make health care decisions.

MHQP recently launched a new consumer-friendly website, HealthcareCompassMA.org, which makes it easier for patients to search and compare more than 400 primary care doctors’ offices across the state based on how well doctors provide care, services, and treatments. To ensure usability of the website, MHQP conducted multiple rounds of testing with focus groups made up of consumers, medical group representatives, and physicians.

Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ), which leads the AF4Q effort in Wisconsin, took a different approach to presenting its performance data to consumers. In 2011, WCHQ created fictional characters—Bob, Helen, and Russell—to help educate consumers on the type of care they should be receiving. Visitors to the Wisconsin Health Reports website can follow each character’s story, learn the care he or she should be receiving, and view the quality data for physicians in their area for measures related to each story. WCHQ received great results and feedback with more than 2,700 unique website visitors in the first three months after its launch. Due in part to the positive reception, WCHQ plans to launch a fourth character.

**FAST FACT:** The National Quality Forum has identified and endorsed more than 750 standardized measures for publicly reporting performance.²

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.