



Making wise use of money spent on health care: LET'S PUT QUALITY FIRST

Issue 5

This document is part of a series of information resources to help you get good quality health care.

Why put quality first?

- **Good quality care is good for you and a wise use of money spent on health care.** Good quality care helps you stay as healthy as possible and it helps you recover more fully and more quickly when you are ill or injured.
- **Spending money on poor quality care hurts you and it hurts the company.** Poor quality care includes not being able to get the care you need, not getting the care that works best for your condition, or being given the wrong kind of care. Poor quality care can be harmful to your health. Poor quality care can lead to more serious health problems that cost more to treat.

What is “good quality” care?

“Good quality” care means that:

- You get your care from skilled and knowledgeable health professionals who communicate clearly and involve you in decisions about your care.
- You are given the type of care that medical research has shown to *work best* for your condition.
- Your care is safe and timely.
- You are able to get as much care as you need (without going through unnecessary care).

But doesn't everyone get good quality care?

No – unfortunately, everyone does *not* get good quality care. While it may surprise you, it's true that there are big variations in the quality of health care.

Medical experts have done careful studies that measure the quality of care given to all types of people in all parts of our country. These experts have found that a **good deal of health care does not measure up to quality standards** – and that includes care given to people in your own area.

For example, studies have shown that:

- Many patients are *not* given the type of treatment that research has shown to work best for their condition. Instead, they are given other care that doesn't work as well.
- Many patients are *not* able to get the care they need, or there are delays in getting care they need.
- Many patients are given care that is unsafe, such as being given the wrong medicine. Studies show that most medical mistakes can be prevented.

Tip: To see quality ratings for specific hospitals, go to: <http://www.calhospitalcompare.org>

What can you do to put quality first?

Because there are big variations in quality of care, it's clear that getting good quality care doesn't happen automatically. Below are six tips on how you can help make sure that you and your family get good quality care:

1 *Be informed and involved*

To help make sure you get good quality care, you need to find and use information about quality of care. You also need to play an active part in all the decisions that affect your health.

Learn More

The website of the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has many helpful resources including "Guide to health care quality: how to know it when you see it" (<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/guidetog/index.html#Contents>).

2 *Get the care that is known to work best for your condition*

To help make sure you get the care that works best for your condition, you can ask questions when you see your doctor or other health provider. Ask for information about your treatment choices and ask whether any research has been done to find out which treatments work best. You can also look for more information on your own.

3 *Get the right amount of care*

Getting the "right amount" of care means that you are able to get as much care as you need, but *only* as much as you need. Getting the right amount of care is important for your health and important for making wise use of money spent on health care.

- Getting *less care* than you need is not good for your health.
- *More care* is not necessarily better care. If you are given extra care that you don't really need, it is a waste of your time, a poor use of resources, and it can sometimes be harmful to your health.

What really counts is whether you are able to get *as much as you need of the right kind of care.*

The right kind of care is the care that works best, based on results from medical research. To help make sure you are getting as much as you need of the right kind of care, **ask questions** when tests and treatment are recommended for you. You can also look for more information on your own.

Learn More

For tips on how and why to ask questions of your doctor or other health care provider, visit this website run by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: “Questions are the answer” (<http://www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/>). It includes a checklist of questions to ask in different situations. You can customize and print your own list of questions to take with you to a medical visit.

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Get care that is as safe as possible

Ask about the risks of treatment choices and do your best to help prevent medical mistakes.

When you are making a treatment decision, be sure to ask about the risks as well as the benefits of each treatment choice. Also, be aware that patient care is not always perfect and mistakes are sometimes made. Mistakes are bad for patients and they waste an enormous amount of money. To help make sure that your care is as safe as possible, find out what you can do to help prevent medical mistakes.

Learn More

Here are resources with tips on what you can do to help prevent medication mistakes:

- Websites run by the National Council on Patient Information and Education: www.talkaboutrx.org and www.bemedwise.org
- A patient guide called *Your Medicine: Play It Safe* at the website of the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemeds/safemeds.htm)

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Get timely care

Go in for care as soon as you need it. Stay on schedule with preventive care and follow-up visits.

Delays in getting care can lead to more serious health problems that are more difficult and more costly to treat.

- Since you are the one who usually decides when it’s time to get care, do your best to get care as soon as you think you need it.
- To help catch any health problems at an early stage, stay up to date on your screening tests and other preventive care.

Learn More

The government has created guides for women and men that tell what preventive care you need, depending on your age. You can find these guides called “Stay Healthy at Any Age, Your Checklist for Health” at www.ahrq.gov/clinic/ppipix.htm.

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Do your part to stay healthy

Make healthy lifestyle choices; follow through on treatment plans and managing your health.

To stay as healthy as possible, make wise lifestyle choices. This means doing your best to eat healthy food, stay physically active, keep a healthy weight, and stay tobacco-free.

If you have a treatment plan to help recover from illness or injury, be sure to follow it. If you have an ongoing health condition such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, or asthma, find out what you need to do to manage this condition.

Let's work together on putting quality first

When you seek out and insist upon getting good quality care, **you will be doing the best you can for your health.** By putting quality first, **you will also be making wise use of money spent on health care.**

Wise use of money spent on health care can help keep the cost under control. Let's all work together on putting quality first.