



How you can use information about health care quality to get better care:

SIX EXAMPLES

Issue 13

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

1 Using information about quality to help make decisions about which treatment is best

If you are sick, you want to get care that is based on the latest medical evidence about what types of care work best. You can play an active role in your health care by seeking information about your condition and about what diagnostic tests and treatments work best. This information will help you understand your choices and be better prepared to talk about them with your doctor.

Learn More

The U.S. government Agency for Health Care Research and Quality has produced summaries for patients that tell about effective health treatments for selected conditions (www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov). These summaries are based on expert reviews of medical research.

Look for this booklet at a website sponsored by the National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov): "Taking time: support for people with cancer." Written for people with cancer and their families, it discusses feelings and concerns, and offers suggestions for coping.

2 Using information about quality to keep from using treatment that doesn't help

Scientific studies of patient care are done to find out which types of treatment work well for a particular condition and which do not. Every year, new medical research studies are done and there can be updates to what is known about which treatments work best.

Sometimes there are surprises. For example, research might show that a widely used treatment is not actually effective. When this happens, treatment recommendations can change.

Knowing which treatments work well and which do not can help you stay away from treatments that do not work well. If there is evidence from patient research that shows a certain treatment won't help you get better, then why waste your time and money on that treatment?

3

Using information about quality to get good quality surgical care that is as safe as possible

If you are having surgery, be sure that you understand why the surgery is needed and what you should expect – before, during, and after the operation.

- Since most operations are not emergencies, you will usually have time to learn about your operation to be sure it is the best treatment for you.
- You also have time to choose a good surgeon and work with your surgeon to make the surgery as safe as possible.

Learn More

Here are resources to help you get good quality surgical care that is as safe as possible:

- *Having Surgery? What You Need to Know*, a patient guide prepared by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (www.ahrq.gov/consumer/surgery/surgery.htm).
- The website of the American College of Surgeons has patient information (www.facs.org/public_info/ppserv.html). Topics include choosing a surgeon, getting a second opinion, questions to ask when you are having surgery, and information about a number of common operations.
- For a series of patient safety brochures on topics that include how to prevent mistakes in surgery and medical tests, visit (www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp).
- The federal government website called *Hospital Compare* (www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov) has information about the quality of hospitals throughout the United States. This includes surgical infection rates and other information relevant for hospital patients who have surgery.

4

Using information about quality to see if your care meets the standards for good quality care

If you have an ongoing medical condition such as asthma, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, or high blood pressure, then you know it's especially important to look after your health.

Much research has been done to find ways to help people with ongoing conditions stay as healthy as possible. The results from this research have been used to set **quality of care standards for people with ongoing conditions**. These guidelines tell what types of care you should be getting to catch problems at an early stage and prevent serious complications.

If you have an ongoing health condition, you'll want to be sure that the care you are getting follows these guidelines for quality care. This means finding and using information about the quality standards for your condition.

5

Using information about quality to keep up on preventive care and help stay healthy

Learn More

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force has used evidence from research to set guidelines for screening tests, preventive medicine, and healthy lifestyle behaviors. These guidelines tell what you can do to help stay healthy.

- The guidelines are shown in a new pocket-size brochure called *Stay Healthy at Any Age, Your Checklist for Health*. You can get these brochures from the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research: (www.ahrq.gov/clinic/ppipix.htm) or by calling 1-800-358-9295.
- The brochures give you the details about which screening tests you need and when you need them. They have a chart to help you keep track of the tests you've had and to plan for when you will need them again.
- The brochures also have tips about other things to do to stay healthy, such as eating a healthy diet and exercising.

6

Using information about quality to help choose a nursing home for a parent

Learn More

For reports with quality comparisons, visit the following government websites where you can compare the quality of care within a state, county, city, or zip code.

- For hospital care: www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov
- For nursing home care: www.medicare.gov/NHCompare
- For home health care www.medicare.gov/HHCompare
- For kidney dialysis facilities: www.Medicare.gov/dialysis/