

Grants Seek to Spur Pace of Quality Improvement

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Participants in several hospital and physician-related quality organizations are sanguine that almost \$16 million in grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will hasten development of national cost and quality measures, as well as acceptance of those measures.

The foundation awarded \$8.7 million to the Engelberg Center for Health Care Re-

form at the Washington-based Brookings Institution, \$4.2 million to the America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) Foundation, and another \$3 million to various other groups to identify potential cost measures.

The project will be coordinated by Dr. Mark McClellan, the former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration and former administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who now directs the Engelberg Center.

The grants will help "fill in the gaps" of the work being done by the Quality Alliance Steering Committee (QASC), said Susan Pisano, a spokeswoman for the AHIP Foundation. The steering committee is an amalgam of the Hospital Quality Alliance and the AQA, bringing together hospital and physician concerns.

"By bringing all stakeholders in the health care system together, this new project is an important step in accelerating the current slow pace of improvement in

health care quality," said Dr. Carolyn Clancy, director of the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, and cochair of the QASC, in a statement.

The RWJ Foundation's backing also serves as recognition that the steering committee's efforts are worthwhile, said Dr. Frank Opelka, vice chancellor of clinical affairs at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, and the American College of Surgeons' representative on the QASC.

Established in 2006, the steering committee's principal members include: the RWJ Foundation, the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Federation of American Hospitals, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, the American Hospital Association, the

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Society of Thoracic Surgeons, AHIP, the AFL-CIO, the National Partnership for Women and Families, the National Business Coalition on Health, the Pacific Business Group on Health, General Motors, Honeywell, Boeing, Exxon Mobil,

the Joint Commission, the AHRQ, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the National Quality Forum (NQF), and the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

The group will use performance measures that have been developed and endorsed by the NQF and AQA, but will use them in conjunction with a new database being developed by AHIP. The data will be collected from private plans and Medicare—all from claims—and aggregated into a practice-wide and a nationwide picture, said Ms. Pisano. The database means that reports back to physicians will "provide a more comprehensive view of their practices," she said. Instead of getting a report from one plan on all that plan's patients, and another from another plan, it will be a report that cuts across all insurers.

The bigger picture is important because it will give physicians the information they need to evaluate their performance across an entire practice, not just a single encounter, said Dr. John Tooker, executive vice president and CEO of the American College of Physicians.

It also will make for more accurate reporting, he said, noting that with a larger sample, there should be fewer outlier patients to skew a physician's rating.

The RWJ Foundation grants will also support the development of cost measures that will look at how physicians and hospitals use resources and compare them with national data. Initially, measures will be developed for 20 common conditions.

Both the quality and cost data will also eventually be shared with consumers. ■

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