



**Question & Answer with Frank Christopher, Executive Producer,  
*Remaking American Medicine™...Health Care for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

(QIOs may wish to reproduce this in their publications or Web sites. The Q & A may also be used as part of a briefing package to introduce this project to various audiences. )

**1) Q. How did the idea for *Remaking American Medicine* begin?**

**A.** The project began with a phone call in July 2001 from representatives of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation® and Dr. Donald Berwick, President and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. They asked my colleagues and me if we would consider making a documentary on quality improvement based on The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded initiative, *Pursuing Perfection*. To be candid, I had no idea what quality improvement was. It was very hard to understand what they were talking about from the language they used. But like many people who have come face to face with health care issues, I was very interested in *Pursuing Perfection* and the opportunity to help make positive change.

**2) Q. What support did you receive from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation?**

**A.** We were fortunate to receive a 10-month planning grant from the Foundation that, in a sense, allowed us to learn about the complexities of health care, and to interpret the language used to describe how many people across the country were working to improve the quality of health care.

**3) Q. How did the series evolve from your planning and research?**

**A.** After talking with many health quality experts and reviewing what was already available, we decided on a two-pronged strategy. First we proposed producing a four-part series intended for PBS. We felt that PBS would be the ideal venue for a thoughtful and compelling series on health care quality. We also decided that the television series had to influence and affect the behavior of the public and the health care community. We wanted to do something different. Developing the traditional PR campaign that public television producers rush to create at the last minute would not work. So, we engaged Devillier Communications, Inc. to plan a multi-year, multi-million dollar communications and public engagement campaign. The goals are to build momentum for supporting quality improvement efforts across the country and to attract viewers for the series.

Second, we believed that a series of educational videos designed to motivate health care professionals to think differently about the care they deliver could be a powerful tool to spread the quality message. We proposed to the Foundation that these videos be based on the experiences of the seven health care institutions that received a grant as a part of the *Pursuing Perfection* initiative.

**4) Q. What observations did you make while talking with various health care providers around the country?**

**A.** For anyone reading the newspapers or watching TV, it is easy to become alarmed by the stories of harm and death caused by a system that is intended to provide care. The people we met put a human face on the alarming statistics of medical error reported by the Institute of Medicine and others. Like many, we are concerned by a health care system that is not prepared to cope with the dramatic increase in chronic diseases. We deal with that topic in one of the series segments. Likewise we were puzzled by why the health care industry lags so far behind other industries in the use of information technology and evidence to make decisions about treatment.

But rather than pointing fingers at medical errors and inconsistent health care practice we also recognized that we all experience the benefits and risks of the health care system. We all have a stake in improving the quality of care we receive. Our access to people on the front lines of health care provided us a remarkable opportunity to look behind the curtain. We have had incredible access to tell their stories for the PBS series through agreements with the institutions that are part of the *Pursuing Perfection* initiative. We have gained their trust and they have shown us their problems and the solutions they are working on to repair the flaws in their systems of care. Ultimately, *Remaking American Medicine* focuses on the successes of those pioneers who are committed to making health care better for all of us.

**5) Q. How do you envision the *Remaking American Medicine* outreach campaign working?**

**A.** We have already recruited 36 national organizations representing health care providers, patients and consumers, purchasers, health care quality experts, government and regulatory groups throughout the country to become our National Partners in this effort. National Partners are communicating with their members and constituents about the series and we will be providing them with products and tools that we are creating to generate grass-roots activities in conjunction with local PBS stations.

Anchoring much of this work at the local and regional level will be Medicare Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) who will be forming coalitions of like-minded organizations. QIOs were among the first organizations to see

how they can use *Remaking American Medicine* and the campaign as a vehicle to further advance the work they are already doing to improve health care quality. We are extremely grateful for their engagement.

**6) Q. What are some of the products and tools being created to support the campaign?**

**A.** Among the tools we are creating is [www.RAMcampaign.org](http://www.RAMcampaign.org) that will serve as the nerve center of this effort. The Web site, which should open in early February 2005, provides an opportunity for QIOs, National Partners and their constituents to receive the latest information on the series and download various promotional and organizing tools like the Leadership Guide we are creating. A very important aspect of the site will be a searchable database that will include contact information for organizations throughout the country working to improvement health care quality. The database will allow groups and individuals to learn about others interested in this issue and provide contact information that will help them to link up with each other. Through the database we'll help groups connect with each other stimulating further coalition development, and grassroots activities. The Web site is an important way to connect groups who don't normally work together. In the long run, we think the site can help broker sustaining relationships among lots of people who are committed to championing health care quality.

We are also developing tools to help coalitions work effectively with their PBS stations and promotional materials to help them spread the word in the health care community. In spring 2005 we'll be launching a media campaign and providing turnkey materials to QIOs and National Partners that they can use with their press contacts.

**7) Q. How is production work for *Remaking American Medicine* and the educational videos progressing?**

**A.** We've completed 18 months of production in the seven Pursuing Perfection health care institutions, video taping over 400 hours of footage. This has been edited into seven 20-minute educational/motivational videos designed for health care professionals. The series is called *Pursuing Perfection in Health Care* and premiered at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) National Forum in December 2004.

We're now building on that experience and reaching out to other quality improvement projects suggested by QIOs and other organizations. Many have provided us with stories that we have been further researching in anticipation of beginning production in early 2005.

Throughout this process we've relied on an Advisory Panel of some of the leading experts in quality health care. People like Dr. Don Berwick, IHI; Dr.

Carolyn Clancy, director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; and Dr. Brent James, vice president of medical research and continuing medical education at Intermountain Health Care are providing excellent guidance on the series content.

**8) Q. How would you sum up *Remaking American Medicine*?**

**A.** At the core of *Remaking American Medicine* is our effort to tell stories, to allow the words of the storytellers – providers and patients – to create the language that will communicate to us all the power of the transformation that is taking place across the nation. But we would not be able to tell one of these stories, if it were not for the courage and moral conviction of visionary leaders of health care institutions who are cooperating with us. They have embraced the concept of transparency and breathed life into it. They have shown us their problems, as well as their struggles to pursue perfection in the care they deliver.

As a filmmaker, this has been one of the most challenging yet equally rewarding projects on which I have ever worked. I believe this series, and the work of QIOs and hundreds of other organizations will create an environment where quality of health care is the standard for all of us. It's a goal well worth working toward.