

## Seeking Quality Health Care

*"Quality is the degree to which health care services increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with the best professional knowledge."*

-- Kenneth W. Kizer, MD, MPH, National Quality Forum



The objective of *Remaking American Medicine* is to raise awareness of the importance of improving the quality of health

care. Dr. Kenneth Kizer of the National Quality Forum, one of our National Partners, was recently quoted in the spring 2005 issue of *Hub* magazine describing why he believes there is an increasing interest in this subject.

Dr. Kizer said, "High quality has always been sought in health care. What's different now is the convergence of several disparate forces. These forces include: (1) knowledge of the quality deficiencies, i.e., widespread awareness that we're not doing as well as we thought we were, indeed, that we're not doing very well at all in some areas; (2) rising health care costs disproportionate to the rest of the economy, which is due in part to poor quality of care; (3) purchasers are now engaged in a way they never have been before...; and (4) consumers asking why can't they get the same level of service in health care that they get in other industries. The discontent with health care is further fueled by patient safety concerns - not only is health care inefficient and often not user friendly, but it actually can be dangerous. This confluence of forces is making quality improvement health care's essential business strategy."

A critical element of this issue is to help consumers compare the work of individuals and institutions across the country. Several National Partners play a critical role in setting quality standards, providing accreditation and disseminating this information to consumers.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare

Organizations (JCAHO), an independent, not-for-profit organization, is the nation's predominant standards-setting and accrediting body. More than 15,000 health care providers - from small, rural clinics to expansive, complex health care networks - use JCAHO standards to guide how they administer care to their patients and improve their performance. Their report, *Setting the Standard*, describes JCAHO's policies and standards. On JCAHO's Web site, one can access Quality Check<sup>®</sup>, a search engine that allows consumers to locate accredited health care organizations by name or by zip code.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, along with the Hospital Quality Alliance has just unveiled *Hospital Compare*, a Web site that allows consumers to compare the quality of care at more than 4,200 hospitals in cities, counties or metropolitan areas across the nation. *Hospital Compare* provides side-by-side, hospital vs. hospital comparisons on 17 measures: eight related to heart-attack care, four to care for heart failure and five related to pneumonia care. The American Hospital Association, the Federation of American Hospitals, and the Association of American Medical Colleges launched the Hospital Quality Alliance in 2002.

The National Partnership for Women & Families produces a number of helpful quality products including *The State Experience in Health Quality Data Collection* and *Guidelines for Purchaser, Consumer and Health Plan Measurement of Provider Performance*. They also provide *A Guide to State Reports on Health Care Quality* that enables consumers to easily and quickly find out what information states have made public.