

Puget Sound Health Alliance Progress Update

December 2005

The Puget Sound Health Alliance was launched in 2005 as a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving health care quality and reducing the rate of cost growth in King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Thurston counties.

The Alliance will use evidence to identify and measure quality health care, then produce publicly-available comparison reports designed to improve decision-making. Reports measuring the quality of care in the Puget Sound region, along with useful informational tools, can help with decisions such as identifying effective treatment approaches, choosing or designing benefit plans, deciding which doctor to see, and knowing how to improve personal health.

In one year's time, over 75 employers, physician groups and other providers, hospitals, health plans, health-related organizations, unions and consumers have joined the Alliance, representing over 700,000 covered individuals. The Alliance is unique in that all perspectives have been at the table from the outset, committed to making changes that improve quality and reduce costs.

About 80 individuals now actively volunteer time and expertise to the Alliance. These include 17 who represent employers, 24 physicians, 5 clinic and hospital leaders, 4 nurses, a dentist, a pharmacist, 9 from health plans, plus 20 or so business people and consumers. They belong to these committees and teams:

- ✓ Board of Directors
- ✓ Heart Disease Clinical Improvement Team
- ✓ Diabetes Clinical Improvement Team
- ✓ Quality Improvement
- ✓ Health Information and Technology
- ✓ Communications

Even more have volunteered for new workgroups being formed, including the Consumer Advisory Group which will advise the Board, plus Clinical Improvement Teams for prescription drugs, back pain, and depression.

Action and results are the emphasis in all Alliance activities. At the first meeting of the Diabetes Clinical Improvement Team, for example, diabetes care experts reviewed national standards and agreed on clinical guidelines for the Puget Sound area. At the same time, content experts in health information and technology are ensuring that the Alliance will have the capability to move forward as quickly as possible with data collection and analysis, to fulfill the commitment to public reporting of analyzed data to measure the health care system performance in the five-county area. In December 2005, the **national Institute of Medicine** unveiled a comprehensive set of health care quality measures and the Alliance Quality Improvement Team recommended drawing

from those measures to create the public comparison reports for health care provided in the Puget Sound region.

The Alliance is not just about suggesting guidelines, identifying measures and creating public reports. Participating organizations are committed to action – applying data and information to actually change the health care system to achieve higher quality health care with better health outcomes for patients and lower overall costs for purchasers and consumers. Key to success will be the willingness of groups and individuals to adopt certain changes, such as:

- ✓ **Physicians, hospitals and others** to provide health services in ways that are consistent with the best-practice guidelines adopted by their peers, reducing overuse, misuse and under-use of care
- ✓ **Patients, employees and family members** to use the public reports and other tools provided by the Alliance and others to become better informed health care consumers and to reduce their own health risks
- ✓ **Health plans and other payers** to create incentives for physicians, hospitals and others to provide high quality care with better outcomes
- ✓ **Employers and other purchasers** to use the reports that measure health system performance to offer benefits based on demonstrated quality and value, while encouraging employees to become better health consumers

The continued contributions of time, expertise and funding from participants will help the Alliance deliver several important results, including:

- ☑ **Adoption of evidence-based clinical guidelines and performance measures** for conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, back pain, depression, and the appropriate prescribing of medications
- ☑ **A regional data reporting capability** to provide comparative health care performance and quality information to employers, doctors, hospitals, health plans, patients and others
- ☑ **Identification and sharing of effective information** for patients, employers, health care practitioners and others to help improve consumer health care decision-making
- ☑ **Alliance growth to increase the momentum for real change** to occur, resulting in improved quality of health care and cost reduction

Get involved with the Alliance. Everyone benefits from reducing overuse, misuse and under-use of health services to improve quality and reduce costs. The goals are ambitious, yet we all know it can be done.

For more information or to provide your comments or suggestions, please contact the Alliance at (206) 448.2570 or go to www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org.