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Contact: Diane Giese at (206) 448-2570 ext. 117

Puget Sound Health Alliance Announces Support of Information Sharing on Health Care Quality

Applauds key Priorities in Presidential Executive Order; Points to Similar Actions Already Taken by the Alliance

SEATTLE, August 25, 2006 – The Puget Sound Health Alliance today announced its support of President Bush and Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt's plans to collaborate with regional stakeholders to give consumers transparent information on quality and efficiency in health care. Alliance Executive Director, Margaret Stanley and Board Chair, King County Executive Ron Sims applauded the President's initiative which could enhance efforts the Alliance is spearheading to produce regional reports comparing the quality and efficiency of care in local medical clinics and hospitals.

“A public comparison report gives patients and employers a powerful tool for choosing health care. It gives providers a powerful tool to improve the care we get,” said Sims. “We welcome federal government support in creating comparison reports. Federal health plan data will make the reports more robust and ultimately more useful for patients, employers and providers.”

“Puget Sound consumers we surveyed show overwhelming support for a reporting system that will help them identify and choose the best performing medical practices,” said Stanley.

An Executive Order signed by the President earlier this week supports the development of Health Information Technology to measure quality at the health plan level. This information, which the Administration would make available to stakeholders across the country, could enhance the Alliance's efforts to produce regional comparison reports, a key strategy to reduce the cost of health care by improving the quality of care and efficiency with which it is delivered.

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According to HHS, the executive order requires federal agencies that administer or support health insurance programs to share information about the quality of care delivered by doctors and hospitals. The Executive Order also directs agencies to support existing regional quality collaboratives where all stakeholders are actively engaged in improving quality in health care. In July, Secretary Leavitt met with Sims, Stanley and other members of the Puget Sound Health Alliance to discuss their shared interest in reducing waste and inefficiency in health care, particularly through greater use of information technology such as electronic medical records.

The support of the federal government and federal health care data would enhance the Alliance's efforts to produce regional comparison reports with statewide information drawn from millions of health-insurance claims, an initiative that would give employers and consumers powerful information for choosing medical clinics and hospitals. The Federal Government is the largest payer of health care in the United States, representing one-quarter of all Americans covered by health insurance. With the inclusion of federal health plan information data, Alliance comparison reports would reveal a more complete picture of health care, which can expedite more robust efforts for quality improvement.

A proposal to fund access to the data source to produce the Alliance comparison reports to the public is currently before the King County Council and yesterday was passed by the Operating Budget Committee with a recommendation to the full council to approve the funding. The full council is expected to vote on the funding September 5.

About the Puget Sound Health Alliance

The Puget Sound Health Alliance is a private, non-profit non-partisan organization – a team effort of those who provide, pay for and use health care services, working together to improve the quality of patient care for a healthier community, at a price more people can afford. More than 110 organizations from the public and private sectors have joined the Health Alliance, representing almost one million covered individuals. For more information, including a list of participants, go to www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org.

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