

# Practical prescriptions for health care reform

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No single remedy will cure all that ails our health care system. Rather, each of health care's stakeholders -- that's all of us, folks, institutions and individuals -- must take sensible, incremental steps toward improving the quality of care and containing costs. That bit of practical wisdom comes from Rick Cooper, CEO of The Everett Clinic, which has earned a reputation as an industry leader in providing coordinated, cost-effective care.

It's also at the heart of a laudable effort by the **Puget Sound Health Alliance**, which earlier this month issued its first "**Community Checkup**," an in-depth comparison of medical services at 14 clinic systems in the Puget Sound area. The report, which the alliance says will be followed by more, reveals that while quality care is being delivered in many cases, there's lots of room for improvement.

The report used billing records to analyze the care delivered in 21 different areas, including chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and depression, measuring how often patients received care that the medical community agrees is effective in promoting better health. It also measured the use of generic prescription drugs and preventive services.

Billing records were used (individual patients weren't identified) because they're the most consistent type of documentation in use among different providers. The increased use of electronic records should be encouraged for quality and cost-saving reasons, but also so future comparisons can be more comprehensive.

The Puget Sound Health Alliance, a nonprofit group of doctors, nurses, hospitals, employers, health plans and individuals launched in 2004, is creating an invaluable baseline to measure, discuss and support the improvement of health-care delivery and cost savings. Bringing stakeholders together to compare notes and best practices should lead to more consistent care; just knowing what the problems are is an obvious prerequisite to finding the right solutions. Importantly, the Health Alliance will eventually give consumers a way to compare quality between providers, helping them make informed decisions about their own coverage and care.

They're small steps on the road to health care reform, but they're decidedly practical -- and positive.

*To read the report, go to [www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org](http://www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org).*