

Moving toward smarter health-care decisions

Amid the political promises about sweeping health-care reform, the Puget Sound Health Alliance is tackling the real nitty-gritty of reform — and has earned more resources to keep doing it. Impressed enough with its previous investment in the alliance, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation today is announcing another grant of \$1 million over the next three years so the alliance can continue collaborative work with health-care providers, insurers, employers and other community members. In February, the alliance published its first "Community Checkup," a report on the effectiveness of health care people are getting compared with commonly accepted best practices. Among those measures are how often patients are receiving recommended diagnostic tests, such as mammograms or colonoscopies, and how often patients with chronic diseases are receiving tests that can signal problems that can be avoided. The report also looked at how often patients were getting expensive surgery for back pain when physical therapy often proves as effective.

Through the reports, the group is providing a mirror to the region's health-care system, so providers, clinics, hospitals and patients can make smarter decisions. Ideally, the result is better care at less cost.

The challenge of solving the larger woes of the nation's health-care crisis — soaring costs and access for the uninsured — is coordinating many moving parts that too often work at cross-purposes. The beauty of the alliance is it has been able to bring all those parts together, which builds credibility and provides a means for them to begin pulling in the same direction.

Better-quality care means less cost. If costs are reduced, there will be more resources to tackle prickly access issues.

The alliance is one of 14 groups in communities around the country that are part of the foundation's Aligning Forces for Quality effort. The \$300 million initiative provides resources to communities to improve health-care access and quality.

In harness with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the alliance is helping provide critical leadership within our region, which is quickly becoming a model for other areas of the country. Their work continues to deserve support and widespread participation.

On the Web

Puget Sound Health Alliance:

www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org/

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:

www.rwjf.org/