



# INFORMATION ABOUT HEALTH CARE QUALITY: What it is and where to find it

Issue 12

This document is part of a series of information resources to help you get good quality health care.

## What is “good quality” health care?

“Good quality” means that you get your care from skilled and knowledgeable health professionals who communicate clearly and involve you in decisions about your care. It means that you are given the type of care that medical research has shown to *work best* for your condition. Good quality also means that the care is safe and timely, and that you and your family are able to get appropriate care.

While it may surprise you, it’s true that **some health care is good quality care, but other care is not.** Scientific research studies of patient care have found that some patients are getting care that does *not* meet nationally accepted standards for quality of care. To help make sure that you and your family get good quality care, you can find and use information about health care quality.

## What kinds of information can you use to help make sure you are getting good quality health care?

- 1 Information that tells which types of care have been shown to work best**

To find out what types of care work best, doctors and others do scientific studies of patient care. The results from this medical research can show which tests are best for finding out what’s wrong and which treatments help the most and have the fewest side effects. Medical research can also show what works best for catching problems at an early stage when treatment can be more effective and what works best to help keep diseases from returning.

Results from research on patient care are published in medical journals and shared in other ways. When there is enough solid medical research to show that a particular approach works best, these results are sometimes used to create standards or guidelines for quality of care. Health professionals can use these guidelines for quality of care to help make sure they are giving their patients the care that works the best.

## 2

### Feedback from patients about the care they have received

Some information about health care quality comes directly from patients themselves, usually from surveys of patients that ask them about the care they have received. Patients are the best or only source of certain information about quality of care, such as how well their doctors listen and explain, and how easy it is for patients to get the care they need.

Results from patient surveys are sometimes included in reports of quality comparisons that are available to the public. When you are choosing a hospital or other health care provider, the results from surveys of patients can help you compare your choices.

## 3

### Qualifications of those who provide your health care

To help judge the quality of doctors or other health professionals, you can consider their training, experience, and other qualifications. For example, some doctors get extra training in their field and pass tests to become “board certified.”

#### **Learn More**

The following resources can help you find information about the qualifications of doctors and other health professionals:

- For information about licensed doctors in the United States, visit the website of the American Medical Association. Click on *For patients to access DoctorFinder* ([www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)).
- For information from state government licensing boards on the licensing background and disciplinary information of doctors and other health care providers, click on *DocFinder* at [www.docboard.org](http://www.docboard.org).

There are independent non-profit organizations that use specific quality standards to do careful reviews and inspections of health plans, hospitals, nursing homes, and home health agencies throughout the country. These reviews cover such things as qualifications of the health care providers, quality of care received by patients, and systems that are used to help protect patient safety and privacy.

Some of the organizations that do reviews give a “seal of approval” by accrediting the health plans, hospitals, or other health care organizations that pass the review. Others issue inspection reports that give the details on the types of problems that were found. Knowing the results from these reviews and inspections can help you make quality comparisons.

#### **Learn More**

To learn how reviews and inspections of health care organizations are conducted and to see the results, visit the following websites:

- National Committee for Quality Assurance ([www.ncqa.org](http://www.ncqa.org)).
- The Joint Commission ([www.jointcommission.org/](http://www.jointcommission.org/)).
- For information about the quality of nursing home care, including inspection reports, visit [www.medicare.gov/NHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare).

## 4

### Reports with information that lets you make quality comparisons

If you need to choose a hospital, nursing home, or other health care provider, there might be a report with information that lets you make quality comparisons.

Most reports with quality comparisons are produced by state or federal government agencies or by large business groups or health care coalitions. They are typically on websites and some are available as printed reports. They are sometimes called *quality report cards*, *quality score cards*, or *health care performance reports*.

The type of quality comparisons included depends on the report. For example, a report might let you compare health care professionals or health care organizations based on:

- How well they are doing at giving patients the types of health care that work best, based on results from research on patient care.
- Feedback from patients about the care they have received.
- Qualifications and experience of those who provide the care.

#### **Learn More**

To help you make good decisions about health care, government websites provide a number of reports with quality comparisons, including the ones listed below. You can use these websites to compare the quality of care within a state, county, city, or zip code.

- For hospital care: [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)
- For nursing home care: [www.medicare.gov/NHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare)
- For home health care [www.medicare.gov/HHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/HHCompare)
- For kidney dialysis facilities: [www.Medicare.gov/dialysis](http://www.Medicare.gov/dialysis)

## Tips on how to find information about health care quality

### **Ask your doctor and other health care professionals and organizations**

Your doctors and other health professionals might have patient education materials for you. You can also ask for their suggestions about where to find information related to quality of care.

- When there are treatment choices to consider, ask where you can find information to help you understand your condition and information with medical evidence to help make your treatment decisions.

### **Look on websites (to be sure the information is trustworthy, choose your websites carefully)**

Websites can be a great source of information about health care and quality of care. There are thousands of websites with health information and opinions. However, the **internet is not regulated**, and this means that anyone can put anything they like on a website. To make sure that the information you find is reliable and up-to-date, you need to **be very careful about which websites you use**.

**Use libraries** (you can get help from librarians and access to computers for website searches)

Many types of information about health care quality are available at libraries, and you can ask a librarian to help you look up the information you need.

Public libraries also have computers you can use to visit websites that have health information. If you need help on how to use a computer to get information from a website, a librarian can show you how.