

Research: The Cure for an Ailing Health System



The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is the federal science agency with the sole purpose of improving the health system. It funds health services research in universities, medical centers, and research institutions across the nation, with a focus on achieving the best possible care for patients, maximizing efficiency and reducing waste, and identifying financial and other market incentives for better care.

AHRQ Enhances Provider-Patient Relationships

Americans rely on their doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other health care providers for guidance in making health care choices. AHRQ provides both patients and providers with valuable evidence to make the best—and sometimes difficult—health care decisions for themselves and their loved ones.

AHRQ Improves Patient Safety

The science funded by AHRQ helps guarantee that patients receive high quality, appropriate care every time they walk through the hospital, clinic, and medical office doors. AHRQ's research provides the basis for strategies and approaches that prevent medical errors, reduce the number of avoidable infections and ailments, and improve patient confidence, experiences, and outcomes.

AHRQ Makes the Business Case for Higher Quality Care

The research conducted by AHRQ produces information that patients, providers and payers use to make decisions about which institutions provide the highest quality care at the best value. This shift toward a market that rewards

quality can ultimately reduce the cost burden on hardworking taxpayers. Research innovations fueled by AHRQ help health care providers—from private practice physicians to large hospital systems—understand how to deliver the best care most efficiently.



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How does AHRQ enhance provider-patient relationships?

Organizations, such as the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics and other professional societies have used AHRQ-funded research syntheses from the Effective Healthcare Program to inform their clinical recommendations for the treatment of type 2 diabetes. The evidence-informed recommendations give physicians a foundation for both understanding and describing what the best care looks like, so they can work with patients to determine what the right care is for them.

This research on type 2 diabetes provided doctors with an additional resource to understand treatment options and further, provided information on how to have these discussions with patients.

How does AHRQ improve patient safety?

In 2003, in an initiative known as the Keystone Project, more than 100 Michigan intensive care units began using the evidence-based Comprehensive Unit-based Safety Program (CUSP) – developed at Johns Hopkins Medicine with AHRQ support – to reduce the rates of central line-associated bloodstream infections. Thanks to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, evidence-based procedures for reducing these infections, such as hand hygiene and cleaning the skin with chlorhexidine, have been known for years, but were not reliably used by hospitals, causing unnecessary deaths and suffering.

The researchers who developed CUSP identified a reliable way to guide clinicians through the systematic use of the five evidence-based procedures. These steps reduced the rate of central-line associated bloodstream infections by two-thirds within three months and revolutionized how we think about safe care.

In its first 18 months, the Keystone Project saved more than 1,500 lives and nearly \$200 million.

How does AHRQ make the “business case” for higher quality care?

To enable patients to choose better care, there needs to be a method of measuring quality reliably for doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and other types of care. AHRQ maintains the National Quality Measurement Clearinghouse (NQMC), a public resource that provides health care providers, health plans, delivery systems, and others with an accessible resource for quality measures and a one-stop-shop for benchmarks on providing more safe, effective, and timely care. The NQMC includes quality measures that are used to assess the performance of individual clinicians, clinical delivery teams, delivery organizations, and health insurance plans. These data give health care providers a benchmark to assess their performance and set improvement goals according to their needs and help patients choose the best care at the best value for themselves and their family.

The breadth of evidence available from AHRQ empowers health care providers to understand not just how they compare to their peers, but also how to improve their performance to be more competitive.

The Friends of AHRQ is an alliance of organizations dedicated to ensuring the agency’s continued role in improving our nation’s health. For more information, contact Lindsey Horan at lindsey.horan@academyhealth.org or 202.292.6700.