

Week 11 Challenge: Use Quality Data to Improve Your Health

Many people decide where to live by looking at data on the quality of the schools and safety of the neighborhood. It's also important to choose your health care based on quality data. There are many sources of information about physicians, hospitals and health plans. You can learn the differences between good and bad health care. You CAN choose your providers based on the quality of care they provide.

Spending time to understand and evaluate the care you receive will have a big pay off. ***Only about 50% of patients with chronic diseases get the recommended standard of care.*** If you're not getting the proper care, you're not going to be as healthy as you can be.

This week's challenge focuses on how to know if you're receiving high quality health care. You will spend time researching your providers and determining if you are getting the best care possible. For this Challenge, you'll need access to the Internet. If you don't have access to Internet, visit the Resources section of this book for a listing of Public Libraries you can visit.

Use These Resources to Complete Your Action Items:

- *What is Quality Health Care?*
- *What Does Quality Health Care Mean To Me?*
- *How Do I Know If I'm Receiving Good Quality Health Care?*
- *What Do I Do With Information on Quality?*
- *Useful Resources for Health Care Quality Information*

Your Action Items This Week

- Visit www.aligning4healthpa.org and search for quality information about your current doctor(s).
- Get information from the provided list of useful web sites to learn about standards of health care quality for your condition.
- Make a list of the standards of care you should be getting and the goals you should be meeting for your condition.
- Develop a list of questions based on the standards of care for your condition; ask these questions at your next doctor's appointment.

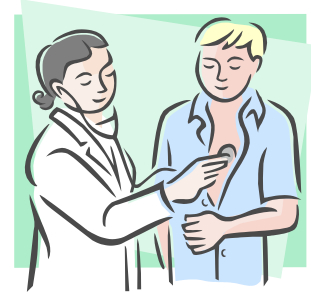
Use the Week 11 Challenge Tracker to track your progress.

Step up to the Challenge and say, "I Can!"

What is Quality Health Care?

Quality health care is:

- Health care that works best, based on medical research about what has made you ill and what will make you better.
- Getting care when you need it.
- Getting all the care you need, and not getting care you do not need.
- Safe—it only helps and doesn't harm you.
- Tailored to your individual needs.
- Delivered by professionals who respect you, communicate clearly with you, and involve you in decisions about your care.



What Does Quality Health Care Mean To Me?

All patients are different, so you should always talk with your entire health care team about the best care for you. A lot of research has been done to find ways to help people with chronic conditions stay as healthy as possible. The results of this research have been used to set standards of care for people with these conditions. These standards tell you what types of care you should be getting to make sure that problems are caught early and serious complications are avoided.



If you have an ongoing health condition, you want to be sure that the care you are getting follow these standards. To do this, you will need to find and use information about these standards.

For example, if you have diabetes, you will find that some of the standards include:

- Getting your blood sugar (A1c) tested every three months by your doctor and having a value of lower than 7 percent.
- Getting your blood pressure checked at every doctor visit and having a value of less than 130/80 mmHg.
- Getting your cholesterol checked at least once per year and having a LDL value of lower than 100 mg/dL.

For example, if you have heart disease, you will find that some of the standards include:

- Getting your blood pressure checked at every doctor visit and having a value of less than 140/90 mmHg.
- Getting your cholesterol checked at least once per year and having a LDL value of lower than 100 mg/dL.

You are likely receiving good quality care if you are getting all of these tests at the right time and you and your care team are working to keep things like your blood pressure or blood sugar at the right level.

To learn more about the recommended care for your condition, visit the **Aligning Forces for Quality - South Central Pennsylvania web site:**
www.aligning4healthpa.org.

How Do I Know If I'm Receiving Good Quality Health Care?

Health care can be measured. You can evaluate if your health care team is providing the treatment that medical experts have decided is best for your condition.

To help make sure that you get good quality care, you will need to be actively involved in finding and using the information. Getting good quality care does not happen automatically, but it doesn't have to be difficult either!

The first thing you will need to do is research the treatment that is recommended for your condition.

After you have reviewed the standards of care for your condition, it is time to see how your doctor measures up. Aligning Forces for Quality – South Central PA has created a report on the performance of doctors in York and Adams counties. You can view this report at www.aligning4healthpa.org and search for your doctor.

This report will tell you how patients at that practice with diabetes or heart disease are doing in key areas including:

1. Managing blood sugar levels (hemoglobin A1c)
2. Managing blood pressure levels
3. Managing LDL cholesterol levels
4. Maintaining a health body mass index

You will also be able to compare how your practice stacks up against other practices relating to the criteria above.

Health care quality reports:

- Provide information to help you compare doctors and decide where to get care.
- Encourage health care providers to improve the quality of care they provide.

What Do I Do With Information on Quality?

Once you have used the Aligning Forces for Quality – South Central Pennsylvania site to find quality information on your doctors, you can use this information when you make health care decisions such as:

1. Choosing a doctor
2. Choosing a hospital
3. Scheduling a procedure
4. Improving your relationship and care you receive from your current doctor(s)

Here's how:

Just as you may use ratings to find the best mechanics or plumber for your house or car, you should use ratings to find the best doctor to treat your health condition.



1. Choosing a doctor

If you need to change doctors, you can visit www.aligning4healthpa.org to find primary care physicians who have received high ratings for treating diabetes or heart disease. If you have health insurance, check to see if the doctor you choose is in your provider network and if you can schedule an appointment with him or her.

2. Choosing a hospital

If you need to have a procedure done at a hospital, go to www.aligning4healthpa.org and check out the care results for local patients in Adams & York counties' hospitals.

Review how the hospital compares to expected rates for various medical procedures and care. You can also compare the hospitals' ratings to find the best hospital for your procedure or condition.



Another good site is www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov, which includes patient experience information. Click the Find & Compare Hospitals button. Search for the hospitals that you want to compare by zip code, name, state or county. Choose general, medical condition or surgical procedure search. You can compare up to 3 hospitals.

3. Scheduling a procedure

If you need to schedule a procedure, like a test or a surgery, go to www.aligning4healthpa.org and see which health care facilities provide the best quality of care for the procedure. If you need a referral from your doctor, scheduling your procedure at one of the facilities that ranked the highest.

4. Improving your relationship and care you receive from your current health care team

Visit www.aligning4healthpa.org to search for your current doctor. Look at how your doctor ranks. Does he or she provide all the recommended care for someone with your condition?



- Talk to your doctor about what you need to do to take care of yourself.
- Ask your doctor if there are any screenings, tests or other things you need to do to monitor your health condition.
- Ask what she or he is doing to deliver high quality health care.
- Talk with your doctor and review the information on quality health care standards for your condition.
- Talk with him or her about the things you should be doing to meet those standards.

The care that you receive for your chronic condition is greatly affected by the relationship you have with your physician. This important partnership is based on good education and mutual trust. If this partnership is not working, you have the option to change doctors and you may want to consider doing so.

Useful Resources for Health Care Quality Information

Resources for understanding health care quality

- **Glossary of Health Care Terms**

<http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/tools.cfm?tooltype=glossary>

This web-based glossary defines important health care terms used by health care professionals, such as adverse effect or diagnostic test.

- **Guide to health care quality: how to know it when you see it**

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/guidetoq/index.html#Contents

This booklet by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has information and resources to help people get quality health care.

- **Your Guide to Choosing Quality Health Care**

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/qntool.htm

This guide was developed by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to help people make health care decisions using information about quality. The guide is based on research about the information people want and need when choosing health plans, doctors, treatments, hospitals, and long-term care.

Resources on comparing health care quality

- **Aligning Forces for Quality - South Central Pennsylvania's public reporting site**

www.aligning4healthpa.org

- In addition to the local web site, these government Web sites can be used to compare the quality of care within another state, county, city or zip code. The purpose of these Web sites is to help people use information about quality to make good decisions about their health care.

- **For hospital care:** www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov
- **For nursing home care:** www.medicare.gov/NHCompare
- **For home health care:** www.medicare.gov/HHCompare
- **For kidney dialysis facilities:** www.Medicare.gov/dialysis

- **National Committee for Quality Assurance's Report Cards**

www.ncqa.org/tabid/60/Default.aspx

The National Committee for Quality Assurance provides quality report cards that include comparisons of health plans, doctors and more.

Resources for choosing a doctor

Aligning Forces for Quality - South Central Pennsylvania's public report: www.aligning4healthpa.org

- **American Medical Association's Doctor Finder**
<http://webapps.ama-assn.org/doctorfinder/home.jsp>

This web site can help you find information about licensed doctors in the United States.

- **Administrators in Medicine's DocFinder**
www.docboard.org

This web site can help you find information from state government licensing boards on the licensing background and disciplinary information of doctors and other health care providers.

Resources for getting safe care

- **The Joint Commission**
www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp

This web site of the Joint Commission includes a series of patient safety brochures. Topics include how to prevent mistakes in surgery, in medical tests, and in medications.

- **Having surgery? What you need to know**
www.ahrq.gov/consumer/surgery/surgery.htm

This guide is for people who are having non-emergency surgery. The purpose is to help people be better informed about issues they should consider and questions they should ask before surgery.

- **American College of Surgeons**
www.facs.org/public_info/ppserv.html

This web site offers patient information on topics that include choosing a surgeon, getting a second opinion, questions to ask when you are having surgery, and information about a number of operations. It includes a brochure that tells how doctors and patients can help make sure that the correct operation is performed on the correct part of the patient's body.

- **Your Medicine: Play it Safe**

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemededs/safemededs.htm

This guide provides information on how to take medicines safely. It answers questions about getting and taking medicines and has forms to help people keep track of their medicines.

- **Being MedWise helps us use medications safely**

www.bemedwise.org

This web site provides tips on how to prevent medication mistakes and is run by the National Council on Patient Information and Education.

Resources for health and health care information

- **Health Finder**

www.healthfinder.gov

Health Finder is run by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is an online health library that looks at treatments for hundreds of different health conditions.

- **Medline Plus**

www.medlineplus.gov

Medline Plus is a comprehensive source of health information designed to help answer consumer health questions. It brings together up-to-date information from several government agencies devoted to health care and health research.

- **Next steps after diagnosis: finding information and support**

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/diaginfo.htm

This guide provides general advice as well as tips and resources to help you learn more about a specific health problem or condition. It was written by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Resources summarizing medical research studies

- **Effective Health Care Program**

www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov

This Web site is sponsored by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The Effective Health Care Program produces summaries for patients that tell about effective treatments for selected health conditions. These summaries are based on expert reviews of medical research.

- **National Guideline Clearinghouse**

www.guideline.gov

This government Web site has technical medical information written for doctors and other health care professionals, and also has links to resources that are written for patients. To find this information, click on “Resources” and then click on “Patient Resources Links.”