

Variations in health care found

Expanded Community Checkup report finds differences among region's medical groups and hospitals

Puget Sound Health Alliance's report will be used as the baseline to measure progress in improving local care over time

SEATTLE, November 13, 2008. The expanded and updated Community Checkup report to the public shows that large numbers of patients in this region do not get care recommended by national medical guidelines. Expanded to show performance results for care provided to more than 1.6 million Puget Sound residents by 46 medical groups, 170 clinics and 30 hospitals, the Community Checkup report confirms that there is wide variation in the care that patients receive across the five-county region.

"The Community Checkup report shows that on average Puget Sound is doing relatively well in important areas such as appropriate use of antibiotics and making sure people with diabetes get an HbA1c blood glucose test each year," said David Fleming, M.D., Alliance Board Chair and Director of Public Health – Seattle and King County. "However, specific results for each measure show notable variation across the region. We all have room to improve in some areas and the scores from national top performers show us that it's definitely possible."

The report lists actions that everyone – patients, doctors, hospitals, insurers, employers and union trusts – can take to help improve results over time. The Alliance will use this report as a baseline for measuring improvement over time and highlighting areas that need more work.

"This report is a sound beginning in health care accountability for this region," said Mary McWilliams, executive director of the Health Alliance. "We have tripled the number of clinics in the Community Checkup compared to our trial run report in January, included hospital

performance results from public data, and added a measure for asthma. Health care leaders in this region should be applauded for their commitment to improving health and health care and their willingness to enable the Alliance to share these results with the public.”

This Community Checkup is the largest report ever produced about medical care provided in clinics and hospitals in the Puget Sound area. To enable the public to search and sort the report results to find information about their local clinics or hospitals or about specific health conditions, the Alliance created a special report website at www.WACommunityCheckup.org.

Medical groups in the region have private access, via a secure portal, to all of the results based on the data aggregated by the Alliance. “The results confirm what medical groups already know in some areas and alert us to other areas which require attention,” said Andrew Baron, M.D. of MultiCare. “This certainly reinforces the importance of medical groups using information systems and other planning tools to help the health care team identify and meet patient needs to improve health care quality now and over time.”

In January 2008, a test run of the Community Checkup report was published showing results for 14 medical groups who volunteered to participate. The updated and expanded report now shows results for all identified clinics with six or more clinicians in the region. The Alliance estimates that the report results include clinics that account for about 70% of the primary care doctors practicing in pediatrics, family or general medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, and general internal medicine in the five-county region. The remaining 30% of primary care doctors likely practice in small clinics or are solo practitioners.

For care provided in medical groups or clinics, the Community Checkup report shows results for services known to be effective to promote better health in areas such as appropriate use of antibiotics and imaging, asthma, depression, diabetes, heart disease, prevention, and use of generic drugs. The medical group results are based on data reflecting care provided to more than 1.6 million people or about 70 percent of the insured, non-Medicare population in the five-county region. Provided to the Alliance by 15 health plans, union trusts and self-insured employers, the data used to create the report does not include patients’ personally identifiable information, such as name or birth date. Nor does it include cost, charge or payment amounts.



For hospital care, the report shows performance regarding care for patients who have surgery or are treated for heart attack, heart failure or pneumonia, plus topics such as communication with patients and actions to reduce medication errors. The hospital results are drawn from several sources of publicly available data, including Health and Human Services Hospital Compare, the Washington State Department of Health, and the Leapfrog Group.

Puget Sound Health Alliance officials said they anticipate releasing the next Community Checkup in mid-2009. In the future, they intend to include additional measures of care provided in medical groups and in hospitals, plus resource use and health plan performance.

“We want the Community Checkup report to be the single best resource for patients, doctors, hospitals, employers, unions, health plans and others to find information about local health care performance in this region,” said Dr. Fleming.

Funding to develop and publish the Community Checkup report comes from organizations and individuals who participate in the Alliance, in addition to special grants from King County and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation *Aligning Forces for Quality* program.

The Puget Sound Health Alliance is a non-profit made up of those who provide, pay for and use health care, working together to improve quality of care at a price more people can afford. More than 50 individuals and 170 organizations participate in the Alliance, including Boeing, Starbucks, Puget Sound Energy, REI, WAMU, the Washington State Health Care Authority, King County and many other employers, physician clinics, hospitals, consumer groups, unions and trusts, health plans, pharmaceutical companies, and other organizations.

See www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org

For the full report, go to www.WACommunityCheckup.org

#