

AHRQ Summary Statement on Comparative Hospital Public Reporting

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) applauds public reporting of hospital quality performance data and views public reporting as one important strategy to advance the quality improvement agenda in health care. Evidence shows that publicly reporting performance by specific hospitals is a key element that promotes enhanced patient care. AHRQ continues to be an active participant in such public reporting efforts as the Hospital Quality Alliance, the Ambulatory Care Quality Alliance and the National Quality Forum (NQF). In fact, AHRQ is submitting the Quality Indicators (QIs) to NQF to undergo the formal consensus process for endorsement for public reporting in the spring of 2006.

There are a number of measure sets available to health care organizations, and the AHRQ Quality Indicators (QIs) are one set of many that can be used for public reporting and pay-for-performance. The AHRQ QIs are a unique set of measures that use readily available hospital inpatient administrative data. Although the AHRQ QIs were not developed for the purpose of hospital-specific comparative quality reporting, they have been and are being used for public reporting and pay-for-performance. When various users began to apply the AHRQ QIs for use in public reporting, AHRQ undertook an analysis to determine their appropriateness for these new uses and concludes that these measures can be used for these purposes, given certain caveats. This analysis resulted in a document that provides detailed information about the use of the QIs for hospital comparative reporting and pay for performance — *Guidance for Using the AHRQ Quality Indicators for Hospital-level Public Reporting or Payment*, which is available on the Web at <http://www.qualityindicators.ahrq.gov/>

Decisions on how and whether to use the AHRQ QIs or any other measure set is a local matter and depends on various local issues such as data availability and data quality, legislative mandates, confidentiality issues and data use agreements, and resources to name a few. AHRQ will continue to provide evidence that will inform and further clarify hospital specific public reporting issues.

Given the increasing role of administrative data in comparative public reporting and pay-for-performance efforts, it is important to closely monitor current initiatives using the AHRQ Quality Indicators so that we can all continue to improve the measures and the ways they are used. Given the importance of administrative data for national tracking, public reporting, pay-for-performance, and quality improvement, it is also important to strengthen the quality and availability of such data at the state and local levels, for example, improving the quality and consistency of coding.