

# NQF

NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM



TRANSFORMING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE

Despite many good things about U.S. healthcare, there is now widespread recognition that it is not as good as it could or should be. The National Quality Forum is a unique public-private partnership that seeks to improve healthcare through endorsement of consensus-based national standards for performance data and through convening stakeholders to address specific healthcare issues.

## NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM



The National Quality Forum (NQF) is a private, not-for-profit, open membership organization. Its mission is to improve American healthcare through the endorsement of consensus-based national standards for measurement and public reporting of healthcare performance data that provide meaningful information about whether care is safe, timely, beneficial, patient-centered, equitable, and efficient. In addition, NQF functions as a unique “honest broker,” convening healthcare’s many stakeholders to focus on specific quality-related issues.

Leaders in both the public and private sectors moved to create the NQF in late 1999 out of a shared sense of urgency about the need for valid, reliable and standardized healthcare performance measures to support and advance public accountability, quality improvement efforts, increased patient safety, and value-based purchasing.

Established as a public-private partnership and public benefit corporation, following the recommendation of the President’s Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry in 1998, the NQF has broad participation from all parts of the healthcare system, including national, regional, state, and local groups representing consumers; public and private purchasers; physicians, hospitals, and other healthcare providers; accrediting bodies; supporting industries; and organizations involved in healthcare research or quality improvement. Together, the members of the NQF promote a common approach to measuring and reporting healthcare quality and fostering system-wide improvements in patient safety, healthcare quality, and an overall better American healthcare system.

# CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE QUALITY



## THE CASE FOR QUALITY

Healthcare quality in the United States presents a paradox. In some ways American healthcare is the envy of much of the world, offering millions of patients ready access to highly skilled, committed professionals working in state-of-the-art healthcare institutions, having all the advantages of the latest innovations in biomedical research, technology, and treatment. At the same time, the “system” is fragmented and uncoordinated, often difficult to access, expensive, and suffers from serious and pervasive deficiencies in quality. Overuse, underuse, and misuse of medical care are found in all types of healthcare delivery systems and with all types of healthcare financing. These quality problems affect all patients, regardless of age, gender, financial resources, or race. Although tens of millions of Americans reap the benefits of modern medicine each year, millions of others are exposed to unnecessary risks, denied opportunities for improved health, or are injured or killed as a result of medical errors.



A growing body of health science research and literature highlights the extent of healthcare quality problems and underscores the challenges that must be met.

The problems of overuse, underuse, and misuse of healthcare services were highlighted in the 1990s, as was the need for an integrated national healthcare quality improvement agenda with performance measurement and reporting at its core.

### **Achieving the best quality care possible requires that healthcare be:**

**Safe.** Ensuring the safety of healthcare is foundational to quality care. In addition to the estimated 44,000 to 98,000 people who die each year as a result of healthcare errors in hospitals, hundreds of thousands more suffer other unintended and often preventable complications of care. For example, 1 out of every 5 patients undergoing surgery experiences a surgical site infection, and more than 770,000 people are injured every year in hospitals as a result of adverse drug events.

**Patient-centered.** Ensuring that care is centered on what patients need and want, rather than on what is convenient for providers, may require fundamental restructuring of care—everything from the way patients make appointments to the universal reporting of patient survey-based measures as part of public healthcare quality reporting.

**Timely.** High quality means that patients get the right care and that they get it at the right time, regardless of the site of care. We know that care today often is not timely. For example, on average, 1 out of every 5 patients arriving at the hospital with pneumonia does not receive an antibiotic in a timely manner.



**Beneficial.** Many healthcare interventions are known to benefit patients when used appropriately but are under- or overused. Millions of patients receive treatments that they do not need, leading to complications, reduced productivity, and higher costs. Studies consistently show the failure to provide effective treatments, from life-saving interventions that can reduce mortality (such as taking aspirin to lower the risk of heart attack) to vaccinations that prevent serious illness in the elderly and children.

**Equitable.** From cancer to heart disease, dramatic differences in the rate with which different populations receive effective care, and the outcomes of care that they experience, point to the need for improvement. As an example of problems in this regard, rates of coronary bypass surgery in patients considered appropriate candidates for treatment differ by as much as 50 percent across racial and ethnic populations.

**Efficient.** Today care is too often inefficient. Inefficient care wastes resources that could be used to provide beneficial care to patients, and thus reduces the overall quality of care. Efficient information transfer is at the heart of efficient care, yet only 5 percent of hospitals have fully functional computer systems that allow physicians to order medications and treatments electronically.

## NQF's GOALS



**NQF has strategic and specific goals.**

**To accomplish its mission, NQF seeks to have:**

- NQF-endorsed standards become the primary standards used to measure the quality of healthcare in the United States;
- NQF become the principal body that endorses national healthcare performance measures, quality indicators and/or quality of care standards;
- NQF increase the demand for high-quality healthcare; and
- NQF recognized as a major driving force for and facilitator of continuous improvement of U.S. healthcare quality.

**The specific goals of NQF are to:**

- Promote collaborative efforts to improve the quality of the nation's healthcare through performance measurement and public reporting;
- Develop a national strategy for measuring and reporting healthcare quality;
- Standardize healthcare performance measures so that comparable data are available across the nation (i.e., establish national voluntary consensus standards);
- Promote consumer understanding and use of healthcare performance measures and other quality information; and
- Promote and encourage the enhancement of system capacity to evaluate and report on healthcare quality.



## MEMBERS' STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

NQF is primarily an organization of organizations. Membership in the NQF is voluntary. A decision to become a member of the NQF is an individual's or organization's affirmation of commitment to and acknowledgement of the Forum's value as a means to:

- Improve the quality of healthcare;
- Improve the methods by which healthcare quality is measured and reported;
- Improve the public's capacity to evaluate healthcare on the basis of quality; and
- Improve the ability of individual consumers and purchasers to make healthcare choices based upon information about quality.

## HOW NQF WORKS

### Governance

The NQF is governed by a Board of Directors representing healthcare consumers; employers, purchasers and payers; physicians, nurses, hospitals and other providers; health plans; pharmaceutical, medical device, and other healthcare technology organizations; and experts in health services research. The Board has representatives from both the private and public sectors. Members have a demonstrated commitment to quality improvement and demonstrated national leadership in the issues facing the NQF.

### Member Councils

Members are organized into Member Councils, through which they have input and vote on healthcare voluntary consensus standards and other issues.

### How NQF is Funded

NQF is funded through membership dues, foundation grants, and project-related funding from both public and private sources.

NQF gratefully acknowledges founding grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, California HealthCare Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, United Hospital Fund of New York, and Commonwealth Fund, and federal support from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Office of Personnel Management.

## JOIN NQF TODAY

### Join NQF Today

Please take a few minutes to apply for NQF membership so that you can join the growing movement to improve healthcare quality. A hallmark of NQF is the collaborative nature of the organization and its commitment to quality improvement efforts already under way. Improving healthcare is a matter of critical importance to everyone, and it requires that we all work together.

### Other Benefits of Membership

There are many other benefits of NQF membership, including:

- The right to vote on national voluntary consensus standards for healthcare;
- Regular, advance updates on NQF activities;
- Access to a Members Only page on the Web site ([www.qualityforum.org](http://www.qualityforum.org));
- Attendance at Members Only programs and meetings;
- Advance copies of selected reports and other documents;
- The opportunity to work with other healthcare and community leaders to develop solutions to quality weaknesses; and
- Substantially reduced registration fees for NQF Membership and Annual Meetings.

### JOIN TODAY

The movement to improve healthcare quality is gaining momentum across the nation. This has implications for everyone involved in healthcare. NQF was founded on the belief that improvements in healthcare quality can best be made by bringing together public and private organizations to work collaboratively on an integrated national healthcare quality improvement agenda with performance measurement and reporting as a central core strategy. Membership in NQF gives you a voice in shaping the future of healthcare in the United States.

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