



Disparities Standing Committee Web Meeting April 26, 2016 2-4pm ET

The National Quality Forum (NQF) convened a committee web meeting for the Disparities Project on Tuesday, April 26, 2016. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss review the socio-demographic (SDS) trial period to date, understand the measure developer perspective, and provide guidance on SDS data availability and variable selection. Almost all members of the committee were in attendance. An [online archive](#) of the web meeting is available for playback.

Welcome and Review of Webinar Objectives

Erin O'Rourke, senior director, welcomed the Committee and meeting participants. She began by stating the purpose of the meeting and the projects importance to the future of quality measurement. The purpose of the meeting was to share the early results from the trial period for risk adjustment for sociodemographic (SDS) factors. Ms. O'Rourke also shared that the trial period comes at a critical time as the health care system continues its push towards value-based purchasing and it's more important than ever that measures meet a high standard. She remarked on the number of concerns receive from NQF stakeholders and the request for the Committee to come up with guidance on some of the key challenges. Marshall Chin, Committee co-chair, also welcomed the Committee and commented on the objectives. He also restated the Committee's charge to:

- develop a roadmap for how measurement and associated policy levers can be used to proactively eliminate disparities;
- review implementation of the revised NQF policy regarding risk adjustment for SDS factors and evaluate the SDS trial period; and
- provide a cross-cutting emphasis on healthcare disparities across all of NQF's work.

Update on the NQF SDS Trial

Dr. Helen Burstin, Chief Scientific Officer at NQF, began by reviewing the background of the SDS trial for attendees that may have been new to following the Committee's work. This background can be found in the [Risk Adjustment for Socioeconomic Status or Other Sociodemographic Factors 2014 Report](#). She then went on to discuss the preliminary results of the trial period. All measures submitted after April 15th is a part of the trial period which will be ongoing for another year. She then reviewed the questions that are asked to determine whether or not risk adjustment is appropriate (i.e. is there a conceptual relationship, does the empirical analysis show that the factor has a significant and unique effect on the outcome, and if the information on that factor readily available). She shared that NQF's Readmissions Committee will be reviewing analysis from 16 measures that will be available in May and June. She outlined several key issues:

- What happens when there is a conceptual relationship identified but the data are not available?
- When patient data are not readily available, what is the added contribution of community-level variables that should be considered?
- Can race be used as a proxy for SDS?

Dr. Burstin clarified that the previous disparities Committee made it clear that race should not be used as a proxy for SDS, but they would like some guidance on how to make that more clear.

Measure Developer Perspective

Dr. Susannah Bernheim, Director of the Quality Measurement at Yale CORE, began by stating her goal to walk the Committee through Yale CORE's approach to identifying variables that can be tested in measures and the nuances of the variables they tested. Yale CORE looked for variables that were tested at either patient level or proxies for patient level. They conducted a wide search for potential data sources. Yale CORE reached out to ResDAC, CMS, ASPE, etc. Ultimately, only a couple sources met their criteria. They found elements in Medicare claims or related files like the Medicare Enrollment Database and data from the American Community Survey. They were able to link these data to five-digit zip codes. Dr. Bernheim mentioned that they have consistently done some analyses with race. Not with the intention of risk adjusting measures for race, but because they think it's an invaluable comparison variable when thinking about how clinical variables might influence outcome risk. A lot can be learned from how race influences risk and comparing that to SDS. She then shared examples of the surveys where they obtained data and the kinds of elements that were included in their adjustment models. Lastly, she explained that Yale CORE will be doing more work to understand how the variables are functioning, which has to do with their causal pathways. Yale CORE would like to better understand the patient-level versus the hospital level effect. They have found that there is a substantial effect for both. Dr. Ninez Ponce, Committee co-chair, then began to solicit questions from the Committee on Yale CORE's work. She then turned it over to Dr. Christie Teigland, Vice President of Advanced Analytics at Avalere Health, to discuss their work on three medication adherence measures.

Dr. Teigland stated that Avalere examined disparities in outcomes in Medicare advantage members using the Star Rating quality measures. She first reviewed background information on concerns of health plans who serve a high proportion of dual eligible beneficiaries and discussed Avalere's risk adjustment methodology. Avalere used participation in low-income subsidy programs as a proxy for SDS variables. After risk adjustment there was very little change in ranking between health plans. The best stayed the best and the worst stayed the worst. Dr. Teigland then shared the interaction results from a number of variables (e.g. dual status, gender, race, etc.). Their team found that stratification of many of the variables included in their model does not capture income poverty. They did, however, find a lot of consistency in the factors associated with lower adherence across all three measures. Overall, they found that risk adjustment did not change the ranks of health plans for the medication adherence measures. Dr. Teigland then turned it over to Dr. Ponce to facilitate a discussion with the Committee.

Opportunity for Public Comment

Throughout the web meeting, public participants had the opportunity to provide comments and ask questions through the webinar chat feature or on the phone. Participants' comments were generally focused on issues of data availability and variables available for SDS.

Next Steps

Ms. O'Rourke noted that because the Committee was not able to get to their discussion on specific guidance for variable selection and data availability the project team would follow up with a survey. She concluded the meeting by sharing the next steps:

- Quarterly Conference Calls
 - Thursday, July 21, 2016 from 12:00-2:00 pm ET

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- Wednesday, October 19, 2016 from 2:00-4:00 pm ET

In closing, Dr. Burstin thanked the committee members and the public for participating in the meeting.