NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM

Moderator: Evan Williamson
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Evan Williamson: Hi everyone. This is Evan Williamson with NQF and welcome to the Episode Grouper Evaluation Criteria Expert Panel Orientation. I'm joined in the room today by the two of my team members, Ashlie Wilbon and Ann Phillips.

Moving to the introductions and the agenda protocol, we'll start of with – I just want to like to remind everybody to please put their computer on mute. Turn the sound off, put your phone on mute if you're not speaking. That will help the call go smoothly, it will prevent any feedback.

We're going to start with staff and expert panel introductions. We'll go through – introduce you to the co-chairs for the expert panel as well as the members of the co-chair on the call today. I'll give you an opportunity to tell us a little bit about yourself and we'll tell you what we're here to do. We'll give you a brief introduction to NQF and go through the current landscape for both cost measurement, our previous and current work in cost measurement, the landscape for episode groupers, and then an overview of this specific project. We'll go through the scope of the project. We'll go over the approach and we'll make sure that you're well aware of the timelines and key dates. This is going to be a rapid project. We're hoping that everything wraps up by July. So we'll make sure everybody's on the same page.

We're going to be using a Microsoft tool called SharePoint to share all of our documents and, you know, provide an area for collaboration. And so we'll go through a tutorial on that and make sure everybody is up to speed into where

they find all of the information with a lot of – well, I think we share on there and therefore make sure everybody is familiar with it.

And then we'll go the next step, as we prepare for our in-person meeting coming up quickly in two weeks here, here in Washington DC. Before we go any further, are there any questions about the agenda today?

Great, at this point, I'd like to point out that we do have a chat feature here on the webinar platform. So if any time during the meeting you have a question, feel free to send us a chat here and we can address it on the call. We can also address things offline but that chat feature is a good way for us to be able to keep track of the questions and our, you know, after action items.

Great. So on the next slide here, we will see NQF project staff. Again, Evan Williamson, I'm the project manager. I'll let Ashlie Wilbon, introduce yourself.

Ashlie Wilbon: Hi everyone. Thanks for joining us. We're looking forward to working with everyone on this project. I am one of the managing directors in the Performance Measurement department. I'll be working to support Evan on this project along with Taroon Amin who's unable to join us today but he will also be helping us towards the project. So thanks again for joining us.

Evan Williamson: And Ann Phillips, who's the project analyst.

Ann Phillips: Hi, everybody. I think that's – corresponded via e-mail with the two of you.

Evan Williamson: Great. So we're the project team. Our contact information would be listed at the end of the slide deck. It's also available on the SharePoint site. So we'll go through that but, again, we're the project team and we're looking forward to working with you all on this project.

On the next slide, we have the expert panel roster and so first, we'll introduce the co-chairs and then we'll go through and have each expert panel member to introduce themselves and tell us a little bit about your background so we can familiarize ourselves with each of the members. (Inaudible) is Kristine on the call?

Kristine Martin Anderson: Yes, I am here. Hi everyone. This is Kristine Martin Anderson. I'm a senior vice president with Booz Allen, really work – focused on our consulting work that's focused to the federal government on (NHHS). I've been working in performance measurement for about 22 years. I do have some experience with groupers both on a brief development project in the '90s and then also as a user of the commercial analytic products.

More recently as a disclosure, Booz Allen is involved in the systems development elements of the Brandeis episode grouper project. I'm not the officer-in-charge of that project or involved in the day-to-day but I am familiar with it and I am very excited to be part of this project.

Evan Williamson: Great. Thanks so much Kristine. Joe Cacchione?

Joseph Cacchione: Yes, I'm on.

Evan Williamson: Great, can you give us a little of your background.

Joseph Cacchione: Yes. I'm a cardiologist at the Cleveland Clinic. I chair of operations for the Heart and Vascular Hospital. I have been involved with the measure development of (DHSC), and I had been Payment Reform Task Force, with American College of Cardiology as well. And have taken a lead on – at the Cleveland Clinic on our episode − development of episode payment methodology for our – for contracting purposes. And as Kristine said, I'm looking forward to working with everybody.

Evan Williamson: Great, thanks a lot. So Kristine and Joe will be your fearless leaders as we move through this project. They're going to help us make sure that we stay on course and really work through all the issues. So we're really happy that they agreed to be our co-chairs and we're really going to be relying on them, so we thank them a lot.

So moving to the rest of the expert panel now, Steve Bandeian on the phone?

Steve Bandeian: Yes, I am. Thank you. I'm an internist. I'm at AHRQ. For the last several years, I've developing an analytic system that includes episodes as one of the

components in addition to other components. And I have participated and collaborated with CMS and Brandeis in the ongoing work for the public domain grouper.

Prior to my work at AHRQ, I was at two health insurance companies running analytic departments. And in that rule, worked with a variety of grouper and analytic systems as well as developed a number of different that report cards for physicians in our networks as well as various incentive payment systems.

Evan Williamson: Great, thanks. David Bodycombe?

David Bodycombe: Hi, it's Dave Bodycombe at Johns Hopkins University of Bloomberg School of Public Health. I've had a long career and performance measurement and assessment. I currently run research and development for the ACG team. We maintain the ACG system which is the university is the largest tech (fans) or activity of John Hopkins University. It's a case mix adjustment predictive modeling tool. Happy to be part of this group.

Evan Williamson: Great, thank you. Francois?

Francois de Brantes: Hi. This is Francois de Brantes. I'm the executive director of the Health Care Incentives Improvement Institute. And I'd been involved in performance measurement for quite some time. My organization developed and it is implementing in several states with several players that Prometheus payment project which included the development of episode analytics tool. And (ATI 3) is also a subcontractor on the CMS episode grouper project but by Brandeis and I think that's it, and I know almost everyone on this advisory team.

Evan Williamson: Great. Thanks a lot. Dan Dunn? All right Nancy Garrett? OK, Jennifer Hobart?

Jennifer Hobart: Hi, I'm the vice president of Medical Informatics, the Blue Shield of California. I also previously worked at Kaiser for 18 years and in general my role has been around information and analytics to support the effective delivery of care.

Evan Williamson: Thanks a lot. David Hopkins?

David Hopkins: Good morning everyone. It's David Hopkins. I'm senior advisor at Pacific Business Group on Health and also with the Consumer-Purchaser Alliance where I work almost exclusively on performance measurement. Earlier PBGH, I was director of quality measurement and going back quite a few years, we have an AHRQ grant that involve working with (UCLA) California to test out an episode grouper and we were working at that time with a case.

Evan Williamson: Great. Thanks a lot. Jim Jones?

Jim Jones: Yes, hi guys. I'm Jim Jones. My current role is vice president of Provider Innovation at AmeriHealth Caritas (inaudible) with Blues own Medicaid plan. I've been with the Blues since 1991 in charge of a various analytic departments and in charge of risk programs, you know, throughout the '90s. Right now, my primary role is leading our value-based programs and performance benefit.

Evan Williamson: Excellent, thanks a lot. Marjorie King?

Marjorie King: Hello, I'm Marjorie King. I'm a cardiologist at Helen Hayes Hospital which is a rehabilitation hospital affiliated with Columbia University run by the Department of Health of New York State. I've been involved with performance measure issues specifically related to the referral to cardiac rehab measure which we are currently electronically testing. It's NQF endorsed so I've seen sort of the back end of performance measure issues. I'm also on (to the) ACC/AHA writing groups related to shared accountability. I've been involved with the Brandeis episode grouper project over the past several years and I'm currently on the Cardiac Clinical Working Group for that.

Evan Williamson: Thanks a lot. Mark Levine.

Mark Levine: Yes, hi. This is Mark Levine. I'm an internist currently serving the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as the chief medical officer in the Denver region. And also the clinical lead for our development of the episode grouper. For background, I've had many years of practice of internal medicine including development of a practice group of 70 physicians in a multispecialty

group for which I also served as the medical director for contracting and performance improvement. I'm also an improvement coach for the agency.

Evan Williamson: Thanks. Jim Loiselle.

Jim Loiselle: Yes, good morning, good afternoon. I'm Jim Loiselle from McKesson Corporation, the director of product management for what's currently called the McKesson Connected Care and Analytics Division. I've been with McKesson for 17 years on the product management for a variety of both payer and provider analytical solution that included pretty much the gamut of all the commercially available episodic groupers, predictive risk modeling tools, and other analytic capabilities. And prior to that, I lead the analytic shop and the actuarial teams at a health plan in Upstate of New York, you know, sending information back out to the IPAs around cost and utilization to the physician leadership teams. So thank you and I'm all done.

Evan Williamson: Excellent. Thanks. Tom MaCurdy.

All right, Jelani McLean.

Tom MaCurdy: Tom MaCurdy, Stanford University.

Evan Williamson: Hi, Tom. Go ahead.

Tom MaCurdy: Can you hear me OK?

Evan Williamson: Yes, we can hear you now.

Tom MaCurdy: OK. Sorry. So my name is Tom MaCurdy. I'm a professor of Economics at Stanford University. I also am a senior research associate with the Acumen LLC which does a considerable number of contracts with the CMS MedPAC, (CDO) MedPAC, (ASPI) et cetera.

Our group is the one that − it's the primarily support contractor for CMS in evaluating episode grouper focused on integrating them and the development of, you know, (QUA), quality and resource use reports and value-based

purchased modifier, we have essentially been the primary support contract around evaluation with CMS for about five years, and we are currently.

Evan Williamson: Great, thanks. We've got Jelani McLean.

Jelani McLean: Hi, my name is Jelani McLean. I am senior advisor to the (Blues) program for Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, (Inaudible) Blue Health Intelligence. Essentially, I am the head of the cost analytics and quality outcome measures evaluation for specialty care including cardiac transplant and other specialty care for hip and knee replacements.

We've most recently advanced and improved the (BC plus) admission which (inaudible) portion of the (inaudible) program evaluating hospitals, so I'm most excited to be in this group to learn and listen to everyone (inaudible).

Evan Williamson: Great. Thanks a lot. Dave Mirkin.

Dave Mirkin: Hi, I'm Dave Mirkin. I'm a principal with Milliman. I've been with Milliman 19 years. My current role is − I serve as chief medical officer for Milliman's MedInsight data warehouse and analytics tools practice. And I still do consulting and so I work with a number of health plan and at the moment at risk taking provider groups around performance measurement and improvement including various groupers, (coverage) episode groupers are part of that as well. This is my first NQF experience.

Evan Williamson: We're happy to have you. James Naessens.

James Naessens: Hi, this is James Naessens. I'm a health services researcher at Mayo Clinic and I'm also the scientific co-director of our value analysis program. Over the last 15 to 20 years, I've been involved with our performance measurement activities here and have evaluated or used quite a number of the episode and predictive modeling groupers on our practice. I look forward to this group.

Evan Williamson: Excellent. Thanks. David Redfearn.

David Redfearn: Good morning. This is David Redfearn and I'm happy to be among the many David's on this committee. I am currently at WellPoint. I've been here for

about almost 31 years now in a variety of different roles. Most recently probably for the past 10 years, my focus has been on using episode of care groupers as a foundation for physician cost efficiency profiling. I'm the one that developed the kind of standard methodologies that we use across WellPoint right now. And I've done a lot of concentrated work in the California region over the years. I'm very interested in participating. Thanks.

Evan Williamson: Great. Andrew Ryan. All right, Tamara Simon.

Tamara Simon: Morning, sorry, I'm having trouble with my speaker phone. I'm Tamara Simon. I'm a pediatric hospitalist at Seattle Children's Hospital and an investigator on the Seattle Children's Research Institute. I am − the Seattle Children's Research Institute is the lead on one of the pediatric quality measure programs center excellence for children with medical complexity. And I've been chairing a working group that has been developing an algorithm to identify children with medical complexity and administrative data. And I'm excited to be a part of the group. Thank you.

Evan Williamson: Great. Thanks. And Chris Tompkins.

Chris Tompkins: Hi everybody. My name is Chris Tompkins. I'm at Brandeis University. I actually have been for more than 25 years. I'm on the faculty and I'm also the Director of Domestic Health Care Research Institute where most of our CMS work is housed. I've been doing health services research/health economics for almost approaching 30 years in many kinds of forms including a lot of CMS work over the − I can now say I suppose decades including payment reform related to physicians and payment reforms/value-based purchasing related to hospitals. I guess I'm happy to announce that I'm card-carrying measure developer which is a NQF endorsement (would be) speak, and the project director for the CMS episode grouper public domain development project.

Evan Williamson: Excellent. Thanks. I want to thank everybody for agreeing to participate on this committee. And we want to welcome everybody and thank you for giving us a brief background there. I know we're excited to work with you and we'll be working together for the next few months. So I think we're going to move on to kind of the background of NQF.

Nancy Garrett: This is Nancy Garrett. I'm sorry I miss my roll call, do you want me to …

Evan Williamson: Definitely. Thank you, Nancy.

Nancy Garrett: Sure, so I'm the chief analyst officer for Hennepin County Medical Center.
                    We're a safety net provider in Minneapolis. And I lead analytics, so we're
                    trying to bring together financial, clinical, and human resources information
                    and use it to improve our care. And I also have worked quite a bit at payers
                    and done provider profiling from that perspective. So I think I can kind of
                    bring that, the payer and the provider perspective from an analytics
                    perspective as well. And I'm also on the Cost and Resource Use Steering
                    Committee.

Evan Williamson: Pretty good. We have a few members of the expert panel roster who are on
                    our Cost and Resource Use Standing Committee. We are looking to, you
                    know, foster collaborations (committee) group. So we'll go into kind of how
                    they all fit together in a few slides here but I just wanted to ask is anybody
                    else that we missed on our initial roll call? Has anybody else joined the call
                    since then?

                    Great. OK. Excellent. We'll move on now to our background of NQF.

                    So here we put together a graphic here that kind of shows the NQF mission
                    and how different parts of NQF work together to achieve that mission. And
                    so you see we serve as a neutral convener and a standard setting organizations.
                    So as we could be in this group here, we are looking to build consensus in this
                    arena around the course of an episode grouper and how we're going to
                    evaluate them.

                    So in order to − before we do that, we have set up the expert panel here which
                    will then see the information into other areas of NQF. We have a Consensus
                    Standard Approval Committee which will be seeing the final
                    recommendation. We have member councils and again I know we have a lot
                    stakeholder interests in this project.

                    We see, we look to steering committees here and again the expert panels will
                    kind of fall into that area as well. And all of that falls under our board of

directors who ultimately had the final decision on the work of this expert panel.

So why are we here? The state of affairs in the healthcare right now in the United States, as we know that spending continues to outpace GDP growth spending (inaudible) inflation and so this growth that's really unsustainable and (inaudible) increase is out of pocket healthcare expenses and we're looking to really reduce the expenses to increase the efficiency within the healthcare system.

But at the same time we don't want to, you know, increase that efficiency at the expense of quality. And so we're working to develop tools here to tackle that problem. And as we know there are few cost measures to pair with the existing quality metrics that we have, the science of performance measurement and the affordability area really lagged behind clinical quality and patient experience, and so in this regard, we're looking to bring the troops together and see how we can, you know, tackle that problem.

So moving on to the, you know, more about the current landscape. So as we just talked about the (inaudible) cost imperative to (complete) efficiency and so we (inaudible) the quality implications is legislation for cost measurement and episode grouper (inaudible) with the Affordable Care Act. We have our quality and resource use reports, physician value-based purchasing, ACO bundled payments as well as tapered performance programs all right now in the (inaudible) cost measurement.

Ashlie, do you want to (inaudible)?

So as we look to tackle that, NQF has a current portfolio of cost measurement and affordability works. So (inaudible) you may have seen a graph that's similar to this before, (inaudible) updated it to (inaudible) and where they fall (inaudible). In the bottom right hand corner, we have (inaudible).

And so as we mentioned earlier, we (inaudible) measures as we look to hear in the (inaudible) evaluations criteria possible (inaudible). Now as we start to (inaudible) cost measures (inaudible) …

Male: Excuse me. The sound is kind of garbled at this point at least for me.

Male: Yes. For me here, it's muffled.

Evan Williamson: OK. Is that any better?

Male: Yes.

Male: Yes, that's better.

Evan Williamson: OK. I think we had some layout issues here in the room that we will be mindful of − so, we'll go back to the, again, the resource use. So we have the episode grouper projects and the cost resource use project tackling the resource use realm. And then we have two RWJ projects linking cost and quality and then measuring affordability for consumers which move in to the efficiency and then taking into accounts stakeholder preference and move into the arena of value.

And so as you can see in the bottom left hand corner we have listed the MAP affordability family of measures and so within NQF we convened the measures application partnership and we really see that going across all three realms there across research use, efficiency and value. And so the real charge for MAP is to identify high leveraged opportunities to measure affordability, again, from all stakeholder perspective. So we're looking to really make sure affordability is measured from all the stakeholder groups that are represented by NQF.

And so, again, this is in NQF first endeavor into this realm. We've – we started off with an episode of care measurement framework and again all of these products here, they're hyperlinks and they'll also be linked on the SharePoint site to familiarize yourself with our previous work. We started with an episode of care measurement framework which led into our first resource use project.

The Phase 1 was the development of white paper and then Phase 2 actually sought endorsed measures. So we came up with eight cost of resource use

performance measure (course) measures. That fit into the phase across research use that we just finished up that led to the endorsement of the Medicare Spending per Beneficiary measure that I know that a lot of you are familiar with. It's something to work on that work as well.

So again in our current work here, we have cost resource use Phase 2. There's also a Phase 3. Phase 2 are cardiovascular condition specific resource use measures. And then this project is developing episode grouper evaluation criteria and then we have linking cost and qualities and measuring affordable care for consumers which are funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation working to get towards efficiency and value. And then across (overall) that we have our MAP affordability family of measures.

Ashlie Wilbon: Thanks, Evan. This is Ashlie. I'm just going to kick over the next few slides. Moving into a little bit more about the landscape for episode groupers which all of you guys are very well familiar with this, but in kind of just set the tone here, set the scope of where we're going.

Current use of groupers kind of out there, obviously very − a lot of commercial groupers that have been around for a long time in the marketplace that are used really kind of (inaudible), so what we've been finding in our experience is (inaudible) and other tools based on the availability of the system that they're in, and obviously (inaudible) in helping to develop the CMS public episode grouper network is ongoing because I believe (inaudible) is something that (inaudible) potentially evaluating down the road.

Male: Ashlie, could you get closer to the mic, please?

Ashlie Wilbon: Sure. Is this better?

Male: Yes.

Male: Yes, ma'am.

Ashlie Wilbon: OK. Sorry, our audio system is not cooperating with us today, apologies. The − so again, the use of these commercial tools have varied by region and the

CMS public episode grouper obviously is in development and it's something that we're looking for it to come into use in the next few years.

Some of the challenges that we've identified in kind of a work over the years and kind of interacting with the different stakeholders, obviously, the complexity in this area is very evident. We find particularly when convening this group is there is a very narrow group of people who actually have the expertise to really kind of understand how these tools work.

And I think it will be a challenge for this group and that NQF obviously as Evan mentioned as a multi-stakeholder organization. We do have members from the across the spectrum including consumers who are going to be looking to understand this work. So while it is complex, we're also going to have to work to balance that with the other stakeholders who are on the table and who will be interested in learning more about this work to see how they can – how this might apply to their work in their organization.

Transparency obviously has been a major challenge in this area. Most notably probably with some of the commercial groupers in the past where, you know, some of the methodology may not have been as clear to everyone and that complexity is used and sometimes gets blurred along with the transparency issue where is it so complex and it's not transparent. And so I think that will be a major challenge that we'll be looking to address definitely and as we kind of dive into the evaluation criteria and deciding what is most important to evaluate when we look at a grouper.

I think more so in the field in terms of implementation, one of the challenges has been that for some providers who potentially are being measured by different entities are receiving, you know, various signals from the use of multiple tools across their practice. So it's obviously from the providers that (inaudible) and so in terms of the NQF (inaudible) and the evaluation of episode groupers …

Male:	You're sort of fading here, excuse me. You're sort of fading in and out again.

Ashlie Wilbon:	OK. Is this better?

Male: Yes, that's better.

Ashlie Wilbon: OK. We are, you know, a standard setting organization and so this really had been tapped with identifying standardized approaches for measuring quality and going to − and kind of diving into that cost area as well. And so one of the issues we'll be diving into at the meeting in much more detail, I won't go into too much detail here, to the extent that we are a standard setting organization and episode groupers provide, you know, to some degree a flexibility in terms of the decision processes − the decision points and flexibility for the user depending on the users how about that kind of dichotomy plays against one another or can balance out in terms of this endorsement process.

And so, there's four other challenges here that I have − kind of been wrapped up in some of the other point but this one is a point out that there is a lot of complexities here as you guys know, a lot of challenges and obviously it's − NQF does dive into this area of endorsing groupers that there could be some potential implications for the marketplace and we want to be, you know, walk into that with our eyes wide open and have you guys help us bring through some of the potential implications of that.

Any questions or additions or − OK, so in terms of the specific project overview, we'll move in to the scope of the work, kind of, setting the perimeters here. So the focus of this work is really to focus on principles and considerations as well as the criteria for episode grouper (inaudible) and evaluation.

Some of the ways that we have structured similar work in the past, for example, around the composite where we convene a group similar to yourselves that were experts in measure development and implementation and use of composite to help us think through some of the challenges in constructing composite and use that information to decide at what point and what components of that development process should be considered when evaluating a measure whether or not this should be endorsed as a national (inaudible).

I do want to point out that the criteria is not intended to be used to evaluate any specific group or tool of product. Obviously, you have people in the committee that have had a broad experience of various tools. Some (inaudible), some public and our goal here is really not to, you know, pass a criteria that is so narrowly focused that it points us to one group but really to think broadly across groupers and really focus on some of the principles that will drive development of any grouper (inaudible) as possible. And so that the criteria would be applied to any grouper that might be submitted for evaluation down the road.

And so, lets do that and we're going to look to stay away from, you know, comparing specific product setter out there. Obviously, a lot of you guys have experience and some with (inaudible) how episode grouper has made certain decisions.

We're going to try to keep the conversation in a level that doesn't take us down the road of who does (inaudible) but really more so what drives decision and …

Male: I'm sorry to interrupt. You're getting very faint and hard to hear again.

Ashlie Wilbon: OK, sure. Sorry about that. I'm close to the microphone as I can possibly get about having my lips (inaudible) so, I'll do my best here.

So again, I wanted to make sure that we have – we're staying away from kind of this comparing and choosing of best approach or best in class. And this project is really not aimed at evaluating or applying the criteria in any way but really defining what those criteria are.

On the next slide which we'll get to in just a second. Review some of the goals and the approach of the project. Obviously, our in-person meeting agenda will be very filled with a lot of activity. We're just now hoping we can get through everything, but really kind around these three points. We'll be starting out with really starting out, identifying a common language and making sure that we are in agreement on what we're talking about when we say episode grouper.

This is also going to be important not only for the people at this table, but for other stakeholders who are going to be reviewing this work and wants to get engaged and understand. We really want to make sure that there's a kind of a common understanding and a common definition for what we mean when we say episode grouper vis-à-vis other measurement systems like risk adjusters or (inaudible) adjusters and so forth.

The next major piece of work we focused in, most of our time at the meeting will be kind of agreeing on what those key steps in (inaudible) episode grouper (inaudible) and those – key principles and consideration that are involved when developing that and use those to drive (inaudible) around how those different elements are − should be evaluated.

And when we look down the road to whether or not we would be accepting whether when we need (inaudible) episode groupers to be submitted to NQF for endorsement, what types of information would we need in order to properly evaluate the grouper against the criteria that we're defining. And so where we (inaudible) is as much − I mean (inaudible) discussion as it is kind of operational guidance for NQF to take and kind of figure out a process around how we would actually integrate recognition and evaluating of episode groupers into our work here.

And then the last component of this (inaudible) at the meeting will also be focused around something I mentioned earlier in helping us really think through some of the important implications for endorsing groupers. What does that mean to the marketplace, what does that mean for the landscape in terms of cost measurement essentially linking episode grouper (outpost) and develop with quality signals and how does that look going forward.

So I'll turn it back over to Evan to talk a little bit about the activities in the timeline that is going forward unless anyone has any questions about kind of what we'll be focusing on for the project …

Nancy Garrett: Yes, Ashlie, this is Nancy Garrett. I have a question. Could you talk a bit more about the relationship between this work and the CMS publicly available grouper and then are you expecting to have episode groupers come through

the endorsement process and that's why we're doing this pre-work, how is the project funded, just a little bit more of the context about why we're doing this right now?

Ashlie Wilbon: Sure, sure. So, yes – so there was some legislation. I don't know the exact number or cost. I believe that came out a few years ago that indicated that the secretary of HHS needed to develop a publicly available episode grouper. Also along with that legislation was language around the submission of that episode grouper to a consensus-based entity for endorsements and it said something about it in on an expedited basis which we were a little bit afraid of, but − so with that legislation kind of as the context has really driven this work in terms of, when we talk to CMS about it who is funding this work because we have never evaluated groupers and in fact the CMS public episode grouper would be coming here for evaluation.

We wanted to make sure that we had time with a group of experts such as yourselves to really think through does that is that mean. We have existing evaluation criteria that we've been using to evaluate quality measures and we slightly modified that for resource use measures but does that criteria really apply to episode groupers and, you know, just based on the complexity and the efficacy of how episode groupers are constructed. You know, we're thinking that it may essentially require whole new approach to how we evaluate that that would differ from our current evaluation criteria.

So this piece of work is really meant to be a precursor to help us prepare in the event that we do actually receive the public episode grouper for evaluation but again, this work is not necessarily meant to focus specifically on evaluating that grouper. And we have been discussing internally with since our new CEO, (Inaudible), has joined the organization on really understanding this concept with the measurement system. He's very interested in exploring ways that we might extend − extend endorsements to other types of measurement products, beyond individual measures. And so, pieces of this work will also kind of see strategic planning going forward to see, you know, how feasible that would be going forward and what that really means if we work to a extend endorsement to groupers.

Nancy Garrett: OK, that's helpful. And you said CMS is funding this project?

Ashlie Wilbon: Yes, they are.

Nancy Garrett: OK. And do you have any word on when the CMS grouper would come through as it did?

Ashlie Wilbon: We do not. We – no, we don't have any word on that yet and if there's potential that it may not necessarily have to come through a consensus-based entity anymore but this work will still go on and it's something that as an organization we're interested in exploring whether or not the grouper actually is mandated to come through a consensus-based entity or not.

Nancy Garrett: OK, thank you.

Steve Bandeian: Can you ask – this is Steve Bandeian. Can I ask a sort of a follow-up question on the point that it just came up?

Ashlie Wilbon: Sure.

Steve Bandeian: I understand that episode groupers are different animals than the type of quality measures that you've primarily focused on. But for those of us who have not perhaps focused on the quality measurement criteria approach that you have developed, would there be – would you have a sort of some summary of high level principles because the high level principles might well have at least some applicability on this content even though the specifics would be different?

                    So I'm just wondering about have you looked at that issue and would there be some way of communicating at a very high level, some of the fundamental concepts that underpin your assessment of other type of measures?

Ashlie Wilbon: Yes, that's a great question and we have. We are actually structuring. There will be a portion of the in-person meeting, hopefully early on where we'll spend some time familiarizing you with our existing criteria to see whether or not some of those high level principles as you described, Steve, what applies to groupers, which ones don't.

So we have a starting point. There may be things that you'll want to add or that you'll want to, you know, go into more detail on but we will have a starting point. And so we'll be sharing with the group at the in-person meeting kind of a (inaudible) of where we think, you know, we'd like you guys to kind of start a discussion based on where we've been. And we can also make sure that we post the existing resource use measure evaluation criteria on a SharePoint site which Evan will go over with you shortly. So you can kind of familiarize yourself with that ahead of time if you'd like to. But we will definite spend some time on that as at the in-person meeting as well.

Steve Bandeian: Thank you.

Ashlie Wilbon Any other – any other questions before we kind of move on to some of the logistical stuff? OK, thank you.

Evan Williamson: Great, thanks a lot, Ashlie. So at this time, we'll go into the timeline. And actually, Steve, there is one (inaudible) in-person expert panel (inaudible).

Male: Hi, excuse me. You're breaking up.

Evan Williamson: (Inaudible). Yes, so, as you can see here we have the orientation today on the 22nd (time), you know, we (inaudible) as well by (inaudible) …

Male: You're breaking up right now again.

Evan Williamson: OK. Is that any better?

Male: Yes, sir.

Evan Williamson: OK. Yes, we apologize (inaudible) using the in-person meeting or any of our future conference calls. So we will – we're preparing background information right now to share with you (inaudible) the in-person meeting (inaudible) prior to our in-person meeting. We have two post-meeting conference calls schedule. And so …

Male: All right. Evan, on the slide, you have the in-person meeting in March the 3rd and 4th.

Evan Williamson: Yes, yes. That's – I have elected to change the day on there. It's the 5th and 6th of February. And so, we'll make sure that – that's the date that were distributed by our meeting department, that's the date, the 5th and 6th of February. We'll make sure we reiterate that but that day is incorrect on the slide. So I'll make sure I'll change that, the one that's posted.

So following the in-person meeting, we have two post-meeting conference calls scheduled for March 12th and March 19th. And, we'll use those to, you know, wrap everything up, we left unresolved at the meeting and also to have − be working on the draft report, you know, by that time I will be working on certain sessions with you during those post comment calls.

Again we hope to have the draft report posted for public review and comments by March 24th and that goes out for a 30-day comment period. We have another call scheduled in May – on May 14th when we will meet again to review or respond to comments which will go to our CSAC. So the consensus standard approval committee in March – or not March, sorry − in June and we'll go up (endorsement) and we are expecting to have a file report completes by the 1st of July.

So that's our activities and timeline. You could see it's a compressed timeline and we're going to get a lot of work done in a short amount of time and we're looking forward to your − you're able to do it. So we have all the faith in the world.

Now we're going to move in to the expert panel, the role of staff and kind of how it all works together. And so, as mentioned earlier, NQF is a multi-stakeholder organization and we see our expert panels to represent that multi-stakeholder membership. So you see, we kind of bring together a lot of varying expertise and in this regard, with people who have developed episode groupers, new (inaudible) groupers, you know, (inaudible) groupers. We tried to bring together a wide range of stakeholders. And we know you're all expert and we really, you know, bring you together to examine the issues in depth and make recommendations to the NQF membership.

One thing that we really want to reiterate as part of this process is that you all participate as individuals and not representative of your organizations. We recognized that you represent different stakeholder groups and we have brought you together but we really want you to serve as an individual on this expert panel. And so, as we do that, you're going to work with us to achieve the goals of the projects.

So we'll be facilitating the work through this, you know, developing the recommendations and then analyzing issues. And so you'll work with us and we're going to establish the principle considerations, we'll respond to comments again as I mentioned earlier, we really like to – want to get the input of our multi-stakeholder membership and then we'll respond to those comments, make the updates for draft reports and then when this goes to CSAC (inaudible) as well. So we'll have the expert panels respond (inaudible) as we move towards that later in June.

Before we go into the co-chairs, are there any questions about the role of the expert panel? And we know, many of you are familiar with NQF. Some of you have served as steering committees in the past. So, it's like a similar process (inaudible) making measure recommendations (inaudible) principles consideration. Yes, and the criteria, sorry. (Inaudible), that's a critical aspect of this project.

OK. So, again, we mentioned earlier that Kristine and Joe will serve as co-chair. And so, they're going to facilitate meetings, (inaudible) members and provide their input on (inaudible) criteria. And (try to) keep it on track with the goal of (inaudible) this in-person meeting each more so than our measure endorsement (inaudible) on track (inaudible) and make sure we (inaudible) drive us through it and make sure we (inaudible) on track and on time.

We also asked our co-chairs to represent the expert panel to our stakeholder (inaudible) co-chairs beyond (inaudible) …

Male: I think you're fading in and out again. I'm not sure what − if you can fix it but I − we're getting about every third word here.

Evan Williamson: Sorry. We'll just try to soldier through on this and I'll stay as close as I can.

OK, and so again, and to represent the expert panel at the CSAC meeting in June. OK. So now, we'll move in to the role of NQF staff.

And so, we help to organize the meetings and conference calls. So we'll be facilitating out within the − send out agendas and meeting materials. We're really here to guide your through the process. We're going to prepare the background materials we've been working hard on that right now, and we'll be sharing that with you next week. And then we'll be drafting the reports (inaudible) based on your feedback and your input at the meetings and on the conference calls.

And then, again, as we mentioned earlier, this is a part of a larger affordability, larger affordability work with NQF. And we'll facilitate any necessary communications and collaborations between those NQF projects (which is the fact) where recommendations by one expert panel will inform the work made by another group. And so we'll make sure that we facilitate any of that collaboration and communication.

OK. At this point we're going to move in to our SharePoint site tutorial then I'm going to do my best to make sure that everybody can hear me while I walk you through it. But if you can't hear me, just look on the screen and you'll see where things are. This is going to be our main method of collaboration and communication, these documents in our (prep for the) meetings and then following a draft from the report. So it's important that you have a general understanding of how this works.

I know there are few e-mails about credentials. They're still going out. If you didn't it or you can't find it or something is wrong with it, please contact me and we'll troubleshoot as we look through all those issues and we want to make sure that everybody is able to access the site and to see (inaudible) here and the slides here (feedback) on but we'll mostly be doing it in the site itself.

OK. So, you should see the Home Page of the Episode Grouper Evaluation Criteria site. And so as you can see here, there are really two main categories on the front page that I want to alert you to. We have our general documents

and then our meeting and call documents. So our general documents are going to include any preliminary information on the background information we're going to post prior to the meeting when we have the draft reports, those will be posted there. Right now, we have the biographies and roster and then our and then our original episodes of care, measurement framework I posted there. So that will be kind of our main document collection area for the work.

Next one down is the meeting call document and this is where we're going to post – yes, again, meeting specific documents. So if we have some in the agendas, slide decks, anything that mean specific, we'll post here and you could see they're grouped by the meeting. So if we just – they might be collapsed. If you click the plus and minus sign here, it will expand and collapse, (inaudible). As we move to the project again, there will be more meetings, more documents, and we'll make sure that the most recent ones are on top so you can easily find the information that you need.

So those are the two things we have listed on the main page, but as you can see on the left here, we also have a navigation column. And these have a few more things we think are also important to the group.

So specific to this project, we have a reference library and this is something that we've been putting together, as I click on it here, you'll see probably with some of your own names on here. We've, you know, a lot of you have written on this topic. And so, we have tried to collect what we could find but also I want to invite the expert panel to send us articles that you think are relevant to this work and we'll get them posted and make sure that everybody can access them and see them.

So, please, have a look over this reference library, send us any information, or remind everybody an email about this, this is something we definitely want to get a working library of references for this work. And so we posted it here. I'm going to have the authors, publication, and all that stuff. Please take a minute to look through this and send us any more that you have that think the committee would be interested in having.

The next thing down, we have a calendar, and again we'll be sending out Outlook invitations for the remaining elements. You can see here, we have our in-person on the 5th and 6th, the post comment calls, the post-meeting calls and then the post comment calls. So all the things you went through before in our timeline. I'll post it here on SharePoint.

There's some links here to − the public project page where we inform the public about our work. There's something that we − I just posted here a while, the answer to the question earlier. This is our submitting standard page and there's a lot of information on our measurement evaluation criteria, measure evaluation process just as a good background material if you're interested on some of the − a lot of NQF does as far as collecting performance standard (inaudible). There are a lot of information on there. So I posted that link.

I'll be posting other links as well (inaudible) more references and outside links, too. I posted a roster here with your − with the assistance that you provided us with. If you check this and see it's not correct, there's somebody you want to add to make sure that you − is included on the correspondents, please let us know. (Inaudible) our e-mails, so as long it's updated, we'll be getting all the information that we have on here.

Yes, and you pretty know each other and communicate. If we see there is a desire for it − SharePoint also has a discussion board feature. That's something that we've used in the past. You're free to talk to each other, talk to us, all the information posted here, again, and below the roster we have the staff contacts here. We can get in touch with any of us.

David Redfearn: Evan, this is David Redfearn and I have the Share site up and I don't see the reference library on my page at all.

Evan Williamson: You don't?

David Redfearn: No.

Evan Williamson: OK. I'll look into making sure that that's available but it'll be able today. I already see the change, one view setting.

David Redfearn: Okeydoke.

Evan Williamson: Yes. But do you see the calendar or roster, contact and stuff?

David Redfearn: Yes, I can see all that.

Evan Williamson: OK, OK great. Excellent. Are there any questions about the SharePoint site?

Excellent. Again, so as a reminder, you should have received your credentials. So people have been on the site before for other projects, but if you're new, I will make sure we'll get you set up and everything's good to go on there.

So we're going to head back to the slides. The slides here just have some (iteration) (inaudible) over. So at this point, we'll just stop and ask if there are any questions generally that we've gone so far. I know we've already answered a few of them but I just want to make sure that we (inaudible) to answer questions about the scope, the project, the approach, anything we've gone over so far, are there any more questions?

David Redfearn: This is David. This is David Redfearn. This is kind of a funny question. I'm concerned a little bit about the weather. I understand Reagan is potentially closed down or at least it was yesterday and I'm just wondering how exactly we are to deal with what's the problems when we try to fly in there. Some of us are coming from the West Coast, so.

Evan Williamson: Yes. Yes, we understand. I'd say that this is typically rare, I mean, I've lived in D.C. for six years now and I can count on one hand wherein there were times where, yes, we've had − the government shut down and massive delays at Reagan, it's usually pretty reliable, but again we have contingency plans for that. We can set up a webinar and get everybody on if a majority of people can't make it in for the meeting. We can adapt to that. We're again, you know − the early month of the year are ideal January, February as far as weather. But we are not anticipating this could continue sort of length of time.

David Redfearn: Okeydoke.

Evan Williamson: Great. All right, so now we'll move in to our wrap up. We'll give you some time back here. So as far as next steps here, we have our expert panel meeting on Wednesday, February 5th and Thursday, February 6th. We'll be distributing the agenda and meeting materials next week in advance of that meeting.

Again, you should've received the logistics e-mail from our meetings department and booking travel. Please let me know if you have any issues with that and then we can coordinate with the meetings department. We'll make sure everybody gets here and gets − look, I know they're still working on the hotel for as long as you are RSVP'd, they'll save a room for you.

So that should be all set. We have our post-meeting calls March 12th and March 19th and we'll use those to wrap anything up from the in-person meetings. So those are the upcoming dates and the next steps.

And finally, we have our contact information here. These are e-mails and their phone number. We have at the SharePoint site which you get as more information. I'll make sure the reference library is visible. I think I need to change one thing. I apologize about that, I set it up this morning. So that − this is the kind of (info), feel free to call us anytime if you have questions. If you need anything, if you want to share something with us, again, feel free to send it to us and we'll be happy to hear from you.

Male: Evan, just one question. What is the hotel that you would be using? We're – my company is arranging my own travel but I need to get prior approval. Will you let me know what hotel …

Evan Williamson: Yes. As soon as our meeting (inaudible) probably let me know once they booked it − I know they're − we have a lot of meetings coinciding and, you know, again, (inaudible) stuff going all the time. So I think they're still trying to find one that's convenient for you guys and they can find enough rooms. Usually we have one right around the corner but (inaudible) going to work for this meeting. So as soon as they let me know, I'll send it out to the group (inaudible) but I'll be sure to send that out.

Male:				Thank you.

Steve Bandeian:		This is Steve Bandeian. If I might just a question or ask if you're anticipating dealing with us in the sort of initial part of the two-day meeting. There are lots of ways to thinking about episode groupers and there are lots of uses about episode groupers. And so, there's kind of like episode bundle payment is one alternative, versus a purely a measurement tool is another alternative and then there are different other used cases that one can imagine. So, you know, I'm just wondering − and the way to think about the criteria for each may differ depending upon exactly what type of application is being intended.

				So, I mean, something that you've given some thought too or that we would discuss in the beginning of the meeting.

Ashlie Wilbon:		Yes, another great question. We're definitely thinking about that. One of the criterion that we have are existing quality measure evaluation is around use and usability. And so, in that criteria the intent is really to have the developer describe how they tend the measure to be used. And so we anticipate that that would be one criteria that would also be applicable to episode groupers but maybe kind of integrated to the evaluation in a different way such that depending on how the grouper describes the intended use − I'm sorry − how the developer describes the intended use of the grouper that the criteria may be applied in different ways or there may be different criteria that will be applied depending on the intended use.

				So, that's definitely something that is on our radar and we will be discussing that. That will be something that we'll probably integrate into the earlier discussion around which criteria we think should be used to guide our discussion as we kind of move through the key steps that are used to build and construct the grouper.

Steve Bandeian:		OK. Just there's a quick little follow-up. Even the use of the word measure that actually implies a particular use which was perhaps different from a payment approach. So just there is just a little (come out) there.

Ashlie Wilbon:		Right.

Steve Bandeian: The word measure itself implies that it's being used for measurement.

Ashlie Wilbon: Sure, yes, absolutely.

Steve Bandeian: Thank you.

Evan Williamson: Great, do we have any other questions before we wrap up here?

Jelani McLean: This is Jelani McLean. I'm trying to click on some of the links for the panel expert links. And I'm getting an error. I don't if that maybe on my end but if you could check and see if there's some issues on your end so that I can validate with the IT department as well. (Inaudible) it may just be my computer. I don't know if anyone else have tried to click on the link.

Evan Williamson: So the links under − the links under the …

Jelani McLean: Expert panel links.

Evan Williamson: OK.

Jelani McLean: So I'm trying to hit the standards page, the submitting standards page.

Evan Williamson: OK. I'll check. Those links should be − if you just go to our main web page. Let me check to make sure that you should be able to access those. I'll check with our group.

Jelani McLean: OK.

David Redfearn: This is David, David Redfearn. I've been able to download several of the documents without any problems for the things that I can see.

Jelani McLean: OK. So then it's probably my IT Department. I'll contact them.

Evan Williamson: OK.

Jelani McLean: Thanks.

Evan Williamson: I'll look into it as well. But I'll just confirm that everybody can access those links. So if you want to check with your IT Department and maybe they can (inaudible) but I'll look into it as well.

Jelani McLean: Thanks.

Evan Williamson: Great. And again, if anybody is having any issues with the website, just let me know. Happy to help you, walk you through any of the issues. And we – we like a lot of the features it has but again we understand that there are, you know, (inaudible) technical issues and we're happy to help you walk through them. So, just let me know.

Male: All right. Great.

Evan Williamson: Great. Well, thanks everybody for participating today. Be on a lookout for materials next week. I'll let you know when they're available. We'll post it on the SharePoint site. And I'm really looking forward to working with all of you and we, again, thank you for participating today.

Male: Thank you.

END