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Contact: Jonathan Osmundsen,
Manning Selvage & Lee
202-261-2869
jonathan.osmundsen@mslpr.com

Consumers, Health Care Purchasers, Physicians, and Health Insurers Announce Agreement on Principles to Guide Physician Performance Reporting

WASHINGTON – Leading consumer, employer and labor organizations today announced a comprehensive national agreement with leading physician groups and health insurers on principles to guide how health plans measure doctors' performance and report the information to consumers.

The "Patient Charter for Physician Performance Measurement, Reporting and Tiering Programs" announced today creates a national set of principles to guide measuring and reporting to consumers about doctors' performance. The accord is an important step toward patient-centered health reform that gives patients reliable information that will lead to better care and help them make informed choices. Where embraced, the Patient Charter will ensure both consumers and physicians will be able to understand, trust and contribute to how health plans rate doctors' performance.

The leading health plans that adopt the Patient Charter are agreeing to a standard set of principles for performance measurement and reporting and to have their consumer reports assessed by an independent review organization.

Consumer, employer and labor groups endorsing the charter include AARP, AFL-CIO, the Leapfrog Group, the National Business Coalition on Health, the National Partnership for Women and Families and Pacific Business Group on Health. Physician groups that support the accord include: the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Medical Association, the American College of Cardiology and the American College of Surgeons. Supporting insurers include the America's Health Insurance Plans, Aetna, Cigna, UnitedHealthcare and WellPoint. The agreement was spearheaded by the Consumer-Purchaser Disclosure Project, a group of leading consumer, labor and employer organizations that works to ensure that all Americans have access to publicly reported health care performance information.

The agreement will help advance the move toward performance measurement and reporting programs that meet the needs of consumers and address the concerns of doctors. Where it is followed, the charter will ensure that:

- Consumers can make more informed decisions based on both quality and cost, with adequate guidance about how to use the information and any limitations in the data.
- Measurement is based on sound national standards and methodology.
- Both consumers and physicians have input into the measurement process and how results are reported. This will help ensure that information is trusted by physicians and meaningful to consumers.

- Measurement is a transparent process so that both consumers and physicians can understand the basis upon which performance is being measured and reported.
- Physicians have adequate notice and opportunity to correct any errors. There will be no surprises.
- Physicians will have information that helps them improve the quality of care they provide.

There is, unfortunately, wide variation in physician performance yet there is little information available to help consumers find and choose those who provide the best quality care. In addition, providers are paid based on the volume of services they deliver, rather than being rewarded for higher quality or improvements in care. Programs that measure and report on the performance of physicians are integral to reforming health care to improve health outcomes for patients, create a more efficient health care system, and ultimately expand access to health care.

Debra Ness, president of the National Partnership for Women & Families and co-chair of the Consumer-Purchaser Disclosure Project, noted that "the Patient Charter is important because it both covers health plans' activities across the entire country and gives patients and physicians in every state assurance that the reporting processes will be valid and fair. This important step -- made possible by the recognition that the interest of patients must trump all others -- will encourage improvement in the quality of care and give patients the information they need to make better choices."

"All of us highly value the freedom to choose our physicians. But there is only just beginning to be reliable public information to guide that choice. This can and should be remedied quickly and the agreement being announced today is an important step towards doing so," said Gerald Shea, Special Assistant to the President of the AFL-CIO. "The Patient Charter -- which strikes a balance between standardization and innovation -- will ensure that physician performance reporting provides patients and physicians with information they can trust and use. "

"We need to improve health care quality by making physician-level information publicly available," said John Rother, AARP's policy director. "This is most likely to succeed with full disclosure of the methods and standards used to evaluate the way health plans create physician tiers and report on physician performance. Having an independent entity with recognized expertise in quality measurement involved will instill confidence in the process and reassure consumers and physicians that physician performance is being assessed fairly and consistently."

"The Charter proposed by the consumer and purchaser communities creates sound, uniform principles for the measurement and public reporting of physician performance. These principles can be endorsed by all stakeholders as the country moves toward a health care system that values quality and embraces transparency," said AHIP President and CEO Karen Ignagni.

"Performance measurement and public reporting go hand-in-hand to help continue to improve the quality of care all patients receive from their doctors and other health care providers," said Douglas E. Henley, MD, Executive Vice President of the American Academy of Family Physicians. "Because family physicians and other primary care doctors care for the majority of patients in the United States, we are the logical starting point to introduce a measurement and reporting system that is standard, fair and consistent."

"The American Medical Association applauds efforts by the Consumer-Purchaser Disclosure Project to raise the bar on the reliability and validity of information that health insurers provide to patients," said Nancy Nielsen, MD, President-Elect of the American Medical Association.

"Employees look to their employers to choose the best health care options on their behalf, but employers don't often have much more information about the quality of the physicians in the plan than the members themselves," said Andrew Webber, president and CEO of the National Business Coalition on Health, which includes 60 employer-based health coalitions representing over 7,000 employers and 34 million covered lives. "The Patient Charter offers consumers and purchasers confidence that plans are developing reports and physician tiering appropriately, and their doctors really are providing better, safer care. We will urge employers to include the Patient Charter in the criteria they seek when they contract with health plans."

The Consumer-Purchaser Disclosure Project is an initiative that is improving health care quality and affordability by advancing public reporting of provider performance information so it can be used for improvement, consumer choice, and as part of payment reform. The Project is a collaboration of leading national and local employer, consumer, and labor organizations whose shared vision is for Americans to be able to select hospitals, physicians, and treatments based on nationally standardized measures for clinical quality, consumer experience, equity, and efficiency. The Project is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation along with support from participating organizations. For more information visit our website at <http://healthcaredisclosure.org/>.

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