NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM ENDORSES GUIDELINES TO REDUCE DISPARITIES IN HEALTHCARE AND MAKE CARE PATIENT-CENTERED AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE

Practices provide guidance for healthcare systems in areas like leadership, care delivery, workforce training and community engagement

Washington DC (February 23, 2009)- The National Quality Forum (NQF), an organization dedicated to improving healthcare quality, has endorsed 45 practices to guide healthcare systems in providing care that is culturally appropriate and patient-centered. The practices cover issues like communication, community engagement and workforce training, and provide healthcare systems with practices they can implement to help reduce persistent disparities in healthcare and create higher quality more patient-centered care.

Racial and ethnic minorities continue to face disproportionately higher rates of disease, disability, and mortality. African Americans have higher death rates from heart disease, diabetes, AIDS, and cancer, and American Indians and Alaskan Natives have lower life expectancies and higher rates of infant mortality.

“Truly high-quality care is also culturally competent care,” said Janet Corrigan, NQF president and CEO. “Providing culturally appropriate healthcare services not only has the potential to improve outcomes, but also increase efficiency and creates greater satisfaction among patients.”

The new NQF cultural competency practices suggest patient-centered and culturally appropriate approaches for healthcare systems in leadership, care delivery, workforce training, management systems, communication, data collection and quality improvement, and community engagement. Individual guidelines suggest efforts such as partnering with community organizers to reach diverse populations; translating written materials into languages used by the local community; and implementing strategies to recruit and retain employees across all levels of the healthcare system that are reflective of local community demographics.

NQF-endorsed national voluntary consensus standards are widely viewed as the “gold standard” for measuring healthcare quality.

Examples of practices include:

- Determine and document the linguistic needs of a patient or legal guardian at first points of contact and periodically re-assess throughout the healthcare experience.
- Implement training that builds a workforce able to address the cultural needs of patients, and to provide appropriate and effective services as required by federal, state and local laws, regulations, and organizational policies.
• Maintain a current demographic, cultural, and epidemiological profile of the community to accurately plan for and implement services that respond to the cultural characteristics of the service area.

Winston Wong, MD, MS, medical director, community benefit at Kaiser Permanente, and J. Emilio Carrillo, MD, MPH, vice president of community health development at New York Presbyterian Community Health Plan, co-chaired NQF’s steering committee on cultural competency.

“Using a 'one size fits all' approach when we are so diverse inevitably leads to unexpected and often bad outcomes and bad healthcare,” said Wong. “The practices endorsed by NQF are important steps in a dynamic process of assuring the best care for all individuals and groups, taking in account the diversity of their languages, cultures, and social backgrounds. It’s an important and essential package in building a first class quality health care system.”

The aim to reduce disparities and create more patient-centered, culturally competent care directly aligns with the goals of the National Priorities Partnership – a diverse coalition of 28 major national organizations representing those who pay for, receive, provide and evaluate healthcare. NQF is both the convener and a member of this coalition that was formed to transform healthcare from the inside out.

"Cultural competency is a determinant of quality and a powerful tool to address the patient, provider and organizational factors that underlie health care disparities,” said Carrillo. “This report provides a comprehensive framework that can help us build a more equitable and patient-centered healthcare system"

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NQF is a voluntary consensus standards-setting organization. Any party may request reconsideration of the recommendations, in whole or in part, by notifying NQF in writing via e-mail no later than March 24 (appeals@qualityforum.org). For an appeal to be considered, the notification e-mail must include information clearly demonstrating that the appellant has interests that are directly and materially affected by the NQF-endorsed recommendations and that the NQF decision has had (or will have) an adverse effect on those interests.

The mission of the National Quality Forum is to improve the quality of American healthcare by setting national priorities and goals for performance improvement, endorsing national consensus standards for measuring and publicly reporting on performance, and promoting the attainment of national goals through education and outreach programs. NQF, a non-profit organization (qualityforum.org) with diverse stakeholders across the public and private health sectors, was established in 1999 and is based in Washington, DC.