

New P4P Hospital Project Is Premier's Latest Quest

BY ALICIA AULT

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Building on the success of its Hospital Quality Improvement Demonstration, Premier Inc. is launching a new initiative to pay hospitals that perform at the top of a scale measuring improvements in mortality, the percentage of patients who receive appropriate care, efficiency, harm avoidance, and patient satisfaction.

Premier introduced the QUEST (Quality, Efficiency, Safety, and Transparency) initiative in late July and said it was recruiting hospitals to participate through the end of September. In a briefing with reporters, Premier president and CEO Richard A. Norling said that 60 hospitals had expressed interest so far, but he declined to name them.

Premier is an alliance that is owned by 1,700 nonprofit hospitals. Premier's purchasing network also serves 46,500 health care entities.

The alliance's previous project—HQID—was a joint effort with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services that began in 2003 and concludes in November.

QUEST will initially focus on hospitals' risk-adjusted mortality ratio, and on how well they deliver appropriate care, mea-

sured by the percentage of patients who receive perfect care according to evidence-based guidelines. Hospitals will also be measured on the severity adjusted cost per discharge, a reflection of efficiency.

In the second year, QUEST hospitals will have to show how well they prevent health care-related infections and adverse drug events, and how well they serve patients, measured through CMS Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems.

QUEST participants are also expected to share best practices.

The hospitals that show the most improvement from baseline will receive an incentive payment, most likely in year 3.

Premier has provided seed money for the incentives, said Susan DeVore, the alliance's chief operating officer. The company is in discussions with the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association to provide more funds.

QUEST results will be made public at some point, though in aggregate only.

"Transparency has arrived and should be considered a good thing for providers," said Dr. Ken Davis, chief medical officer of North Mississippi Health Services, at the briefing. The Tupelo, Miss.-based hospital is a member of Premier and will be a QUEST participant, said Dr. Davis. ■

Alzheimer Disease Onslaught Requires Action Now, Some Say

BY MICHELE G. SULLIVAN

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Alzheimer disease advocates are calling for stepped-up measures to combat what is being called a "looming avalanche" of Alzheimer disease diagnoses in the United States.

Alzheimer disease prevalence in this country is projected to skyrocket in the next 40 years, tripling from 4.5 million now to more than 13 million. The national health infrastructure is simply not equipped to handle the increase, said Robert Egge of the Center for Health Transformation.

"The projections, not only in terms of the impact on individual lives, but also in national costs, are stunning," Mr. Egge said in an interview. "Because of our national strategy—or rather the lack of it—we are not on the right footing to get a handle on this before it hits."

The Center for Health Transformation, a health policy think-tank founded by former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, advocates the development of a national AD strategic plan.

Such a plan would address two facets of the problem: money and leadership, said Mr. Egge, director of the center's Alzheimer disease project.

The numbers are distressing, he and Mr. Gingrich pointed out in a recently published commentary. AD is the nation's third

most expensive medical condition, consuming \$100 billion each year in Medicare and Medicaid dollars.

"Without medical breakthroughs, as the Boomers pass through their elder years, federal spending on AD care will increase to more than \$1 trillion per year by 2050, in today's dollars. That is more than 10% of America's current gross domestic product," they wrote (*Alzheimers Dement.* 2007;3:239-42).

A national AD strategy would build the case for making substantial national investments in research for both early detection and pharmacotherapy, and urge the Food and Drug Administration to accelerate new drug evaluation, Mr. Gingrich and Mr. Egge wrote. A strategic plan also should help caregivers, perhaps by providing some kind of financial support to those who save Medicare money by keeping a patient at home as long as possible.

The Alzheimer's Association has joined the Center for Health Transformation in taking the first steps toward building a national plan. In mid-July, the two entities announced the formation of a study group cochaired by Mr. Gingrich and former Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.). The group will consist of nonpartisan, independent health policy experts and is charged with evaluating the nation's efforts to combat the disease and recommend strategies for addressing shortcomings. ■

POLICY & PRACTICE

Obesity Rivals Tobacco in Impact

Obesity's impact on America's health rivals that of tobacco use in terms of morbidity and related health risk, according to a report from the President's Cancer Panel, a division of the National Cancer Institute. The report cited research showing overall cancer death rates are 50%-60% higher among the obese, and said that two-thirds of all cancer deaths could be prevented through changes in lifestyle. However, the panel said there are policy, industry and cultural barriers that prevent the public from making the changes necessary to reduce cancer risk. For example, the panel noted a lack of adequate sidewalks and safe recreational areas, along with worsening physical education in schools and federal subsidies for foods that contribute to obesity. The report urged physicians to increase efforts to educate patients about weight management, and recommended changes in reimbursement to enable such counseling. "To minimize the growing financial burden that cancer inflicts on our nation, we must dramatically increase our focus on disease prevention and ensure that preventive services, including nutrition and physical activity interventions, become an integral and reimbursable component of primary care," the panel said in a letter to President Bush.

AAFP, ACP to Test Medical Home

The American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics will join with the UnitedHealth Group to test the concept of a patient-centered medical home. UnitedHealth Group will provide financial and administrative support for the project, which will be conducted with six Florida-based small and mid-sized general internal medicine groups. Practices will have to demonstrate that they have the infrastructure and personnel to provide patient-centered care, and United will provide additional payments to the physicians whose care is based on the model and who demonstrate measurable improvements in the overall health of their patients. The organizations involved in the pilot expressed hope that the results will help determine how to refine and expand the use of the patient-centered medical home concept. "This is what physicians-in-training signed up for when they elected to become internists and this is the care that patients want and deserve," said ACP Florida chapter governor Dr. Kay Mitchell in a statement.

DTC Spending Triples

Spending on direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising by the pharmaceutical industry has more than tripled in the last decade, despite criticism and regulatory action designed to curb it, according to a study in the Aug. 16 *New England Journal of Medicine*. The researchers analyzed the pharmaceutical industry's spending on DTC advertising and pro-

motions to physicians, and found that total real spending on drug promotions almost tripled, from more than \$11 billion to almost \$30 billion, between 1996 and 2005. Most of the spending was aimed at physicians. But over the past 9 years, spending on DTC ads and free samples has risen as a percentage of the overall promotional budget, while promotional investment in professional journals has fallen. Real spending on DTC advertising increased by 330% from 1996 to 2005, the researchers found. That spending was concentrated among a relatively small number of brands; the 20 drugs with the highest spending made up more than half of total industry spending on DTC ads in 2005, the study found. Most of these were new drugs used to treat chronic conditions, and nearly all ad campaigns for the most heavily advertised drugs began within a year of the drugs' Food and Drug Administration approval.

ABIM Quality Program Adopted

Four large national health care organizations are using the American Board of Internal Medicine's Maintenance of Certification program to recognize and reward quality care, the ABIM said. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, CIGNA HealthCare, Humana, and Wellpoint Inc., will incorporate ABIM's tools into their quality recognition programs. Internists who regularly complete an ABIM Practice Improvement Module (PIM) can authorize ABIM to send verification of these completed Web-based quality improvement modules to health plans participating in the program. Physicians participating in programs offered by the insurers and the Blues association will receive special recognition in provider directories.

Physical Activity Bill Introduced

U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp (R-Tenn.), Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.), and Rep. Jay Inslee (D-Wash.) have introduced a bill to mandate more physical activity for schoolchildren. The Fitness Integrated With Teaching Kids (FIT Kids) Act would add physical education to the ways of determining accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act. States would be graded on how well they worked to meet a target for required physical education of 150 minutes per week in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week for middle- and high-school students. Schools would be required to report their progress. "The statistics on childhood obesity are staggering, and we need to get them going in the other direction," Rep. Wamp said in a statement. "Research shows that healthy children learn more effectively and achieve more academically. The FIT Kids Act would ensure a strong emphasis on physical education to help bolster academic performance and provide students with the physical activity and education to lead healthy lifestyles."

—Jane Anderson