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**National Report Compares Seattle's Health Care Market to Others,  
More Improvement Needed in Regional Quality of Care**

***Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Provides Snapshot of 14 Communities***

SEATTLE, April 19, 2007 – Seattle is one of 14 communities compared in a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and Center for Health Improvement (CHI) report that looked at seven important attributes that drive quality health care. The RWJF “check-up” for Seattle was conducted in October, 2005, resulting in grades that show where improvement is needed on a number of market attributes crucial to driving and sustaining high-quality health care.

The RWJF check-up report compares communities using seven measures recommended by the Institute of Medicine and national experts. Overall, Boston ranked highest with a grade of “B”, Seattle and 11 other cities each earned a “C”, and a “D” was given to Oklahoma City. These overall grades were based on observations made by RWJF about the performance of each community for seven measures of a well-functioning health care market: (1) community leadership; (2) support for doctors and hospitals to improve quality; (3) measurement of health care quality performance; (4) public reporting of the performance of doctors and hospitals; (5) use of incentives to reward quality improvement; (6) status of health information technology infrastructure; and (7) activities to engage consumers to help improve health care quality.

“As the organization leading the regional effort to measure and publicly report health care performance, it is uncomfortable for our community to receive a report card that is less than an ‘A’,” noted Margaret Stanley, executive director of the Puget Sound Health Alliance.

“However, the need to improve health care quality is real and the very reason why so many doctors, hospitals, employers, health plans, and consumers participate in the Alliance.”

“When the Alliance received the materials from RWJF about the comparison report, our first reaction was to push back about how Seattle was rated – to point out that the scores are based on observations made by RWJF nearly 18 months ago, that we have made great

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progress since then, that an overall score of “C” for this region could harm the reputation of the work done by the Alliance since 2005, and that people could misunderstand and misuse the results,” said Stanley. “Ironically, these are the kinds of issues that some doctors are raising about the public report on health care performance that the Alliance is developing. Getting our report card from RWJF makes us even more sensitive to how they may feel.”

The community study was conducted by the Center for Health Improvement, which also directs *Aligning Forces for Quality*, a RWJF program that helps communities use local market forces to improve the quality of health care. “The study illustrates the starting point and end goals for improvement,” said Patricia Powers, M.P.P.A., president and chief executive officer of the Sacramento-based Center for Health Improvement. “It demonstrates multiple opportunities for communities to improve, such as measuring the actual performance of providers, publicly reporting that information and encouraging consumers to act on it.”

After reviewing the RWJF market scan, Alliance leaders not only agree with the content of the report but strongly recommend that everyone use it to consider what they can do to contribute to improving health care quality across the region.

“We are proud of the progress made by the Alliance for the Puget Sound region since the RWJF market scan was done back in 2005,” said Ron Sims, Alliance Board member and King County Executive. “But we all know that more is needed to promote and support health care quality improvement.”

The RWJF report notes that there are wide variations for each of the measures among the 14 communities, many of which were at the beginning stages of organizing quality improvement efforts when the market scan was conducted. Since October 2005, for example, the Alliance and its participants have made progress in several areas. Many local organizations also have excellent programs that help to improve health care quality.

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Specific to the Alliance, a few examples of recent progress include:

- (1) **Community Leadership:** Today more than 140 public and private organizations participate in the Alliance; the Washington State Blue Ribbon Commission recently recommended that the State Legislature fund statewide expansion of the health care performance reports; and, the Alliance was named as the nation's first "Community Leader for Value-Driven Health Care" by Dept. of Health and Human Services Secretary Leavitt.
- (2) **Support to Improve Quality:** Clinical Improvement Teams have recommended guidelines for improved quality of care for diabetes, heart disease, low back pain, depression, and the use of pharmaceuticals; and work is now in process on prevention and asthma.
- (3) **Measuring Quality Performance:** Each of the Clinical Improvement reports recommend how to measure local health care performance for each of these areas of care.
- (4) **Public Reporting of Health Care Performance:** The first public report on health care performance for the Puget Sound region will be published later this year, based on data from fifteen insurers, employers and union trusts.
- (5) **Use of Financial Incentives to Reward Quality Improvement:** Each Clinical Improvement report lists specific "change strategies" to align incentives around recommended care, and an Incentives Workgroup has developed initial ideas for recognizing and rewarding quality care.
- (6) **Health Information Technology Infrastructure:** In 2006, in collaboration with the Washington Health Information Collaborative, over \$1 million was awarded to small clinics and rural hospitals for electronic medical records and chronic care registries.
- (7) **Consumer Engagement:** A Consumer Advisory Group was formed in 2006 to give input to the Board; and, we are part of the national RWJF collaborative on consumer engagement.

Others rated in the RWJF market scan are: Boston; Cincinnati; Detroit; Indianapolis; Madison; Memphis; Minneapolis; Oklahoma City; Phoenix; Portland; Rhode Island; Rochester; and Savannah. For the full report, go to [www.rwjf.org/qualitypubs](http://www.rwjf.org/qualitypubs) or [www.forces4quality.org](http://www.forces4quality.org).

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans. The Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. The Center for Health Improvement is a national, nonprofit health policy organization dedicated to improving population health and encouraging healthy behaviors. CHI uses evidence-based research as the basis for policy innovation and implementation.

The Puget Sound Health Alliance is a private, non-profit organization – a team effort of those who provide, pay for and use health care services, working together to improve the quality of patient care for a healthier community, at a price more people can afford. More than 140 organizations from the public and private sectors have joined the Health Alliance, representing over one million covered individuals. For more information, including a list of participants, go to [www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org](http://www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org).

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