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Survey Says ... Puget Sound Residents Want Help Finding the Best Local Doctors

Useful comparison reports needed, residents tell Puget Sound Health Alliance

SEATTLE, May 17, 2006 – Fewer than half of the people responding to a Puget Sound Health Alliance survey feel they have enough useful information to find the region’s best clinics and medical groups.

One of the solutions, consumers say, is to issue unbiased reports comparing local physician practices and hospitals, according to a recent online survey of nearly 3,000 insured residents of King, Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston and Kitsap counties.

Conducted between February 24, 2006 and March 21, 2006, the survey found that the vast majority of local consumers have access to information allowing them to make healthy lifestyle decisions. But they often do not know where to get useful information to choose the best clinics and medical centers for their care.

Margaret Stanley, executive director of the Puget Sound Health Alliance, said that these survey results point to a gap in consumer knowledge that the Health Alliance is working to fill.

“When fewer than half of local consumers feel that they have useful information about how to find the best physician clinics in the region – and only 51 percent say they have useful information on how to find the best hospitals – it’s time to do things differently,” Stanley said. “A significant majority of those responding said that providing unbiased comparisons of clinics and hospitals should be a priority for the Health Alliance.”

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The Health Alliance is pulling together the data to publish the first regional report comparing health care quality, cost and patient experience at clinics and medical centers. This report is expected to be available to the public next year. It is a key part of the plan to improve quality and affordability of local health care by empowering consumers with better information.

Other Alliance activities include bringing together local physician leaders and other health professionals to adopt treatment guidelines for use by doctors across the region for more consistent, effective care. Focus areas are diabetes, heart disease, back pain, depression, and prescription drugs. The Alliance is also developing materials for consumers to use related to decision-making about their own care. Overall, the Alliance is working to define, measure, report and reward high quality, efficient health care.

The online survey of consumers was conducted to get a snapshot of health care issues of interest to Puget Sound residents. Survey results indicate that consumers living in the Puget Sound region are most interested in lowering the cost of health care (76%), lowering the cost of health insurance (77%), and increasing the quality of care (76%).

When it comes to a person's decision to use a particular hospital or physician, prior experience with that particular medical provider was the most significant factor (89%), followed by a referral or recommendation by a primary care physician (69%), and word-of-mouth from a friend or family member (50%). At the same time, nearly all (94%) said that "an un-biased comparison of all the hospitals, specialists or doctors in my area" would likely influence their choice of hospital or physician. Not surprisingly, 95 percent of respondents said a comparison of local health care providers is an important priority for the Alliance.

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“You can’t improve what you don’t measure,” said Annette King, director of benefits for Starbucks Coffee Company, one of the first area employers to join the Alliance. “The Alliance is getting everyone on the same page about expectations for quality, cost of care and patient experience – which leads to better health and more affordable care.”

About the Puget Sound Health Alliance

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, all working together to improve the quality of patient care for a healthier community, at a price more people can afford. Serving as a trusted source for information and public reporting that is grounded in research and reflects best practices, the Alliance helps people become smarter consumers of health care while encouraging everyone to take more control over improving personal health.

Approximately 100 organizations from the public and private sector participate in the Health Alliance, representing nearly 900,000 covered individuals. For more information, including a full list of Alliance participants, please contact us at 206.448.2570 or visit our website at www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org.

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