

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

How does your clinic compare...or do you even care?

Seattle PI online, 7/16/09

New today: the latest version of the [Community Checkup](#), a report comparing health care at clinics and hospitals around the Puget Sound. Have a look to see how your clinic measures up. This report, produced by the [Puget Sound Health Alliance](#) (disclosure: [former employer](#)), looks at how health providers are doing with prevention (e.g., cancer screenings) and care for common conditions like depression, diabetes and asthma. The report shows whether patients are getting certain treatments and tests that have been shown to work, like blood sugar tests for people with diabetes. It also looks at whether patients are getting stuff they don't need -- tests or medications that probably won't help and may even create problems, like antibiotics for a common cold.

You can use the Checkup to see how your clinic does vs. the other clinics in your area with these aspects of care (the report covers nearly 240 clinics in King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Thurston counties). You can also use it to find out what kind of care is recommended for the different conditions covered in the report. And you can see how care for people with commercial insurance compares to care for those covered by Medicaid.

This information is of interest, yes?

And yet, although there are a growing number of reports like the Checkup produced around the country, studies show a surprisingly small portion of Americans ([less than 15% in a recent telephone survey](#)) 1) know about, and 2) use them. So this group in California, the [Center for Advancing Health](#), did an [interesting thing](#). They looked at some of the reports and information we *do* use, bigtime, to see how they compare to these "health decision aids" that so far, we haven't been using so much.

Specifically, they dissected the strategies and selling points of [Consumer Reports: Car Buying Guide](#); [eBay](#); [US News & World Report: America's Best Colleges](#), and the FDA's [Nutrition Facts Panels](#) (that thing on the back of your cereal box). Here are some of the things they found out about what makes us use these reports, and a look at the [Community Checkup](#) through this lens:

1) A belief the "product" varies from one manufacturer/college/food to the other and that it is therefore worthwhile to figure out which one is better.

Check. Maybe not everybody believes this yet, but health care quality varies. Sometimes a lot. (If you're dubious, have a look at the [Checkup](#)).

2) A choice that is high stakes (buying a car--\$, picking a college--your future).

Check. (Your health.)

3) Information that isn't easy to pull together/test on your own.

Check. Go ahead, give it a shot.

4) Confidence that the comparison/test/information gathering has been done well and without bias, in other words, that it comes from an expert, independent and trustworthy source.

Let me just say, [since I've seen the sausage making](#), that the Alliance process is rigorous and great pains are taken to ensure the report is as reasonable and accurate as possible. And I should mention that the Alliance is a non-profit coalition of all the players in the health system -- doctors, health plans, employers, regular folks. Beyond that, given my gigantic conflict of interest, I leave it to you to judge.

5) Information that you can understand and use.

Your call on these. Check out the [Checkup](#) and then click below to cast your vote.

[Is the information in the Community Checkup useful for your health care decisions?](#)

[Is the information in the Community Checkup easy to understand?](#)