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Puget Sound Health Alliance's First Regional Report on Health Care Performance to be Based on Data For About Two Million People

Initial data to come from fifteen health plans, employers and unions

SEATTLE, March 10, 2007 – The Puget Sound Health Alliance today announced it has reached agreement with at least 15 area health plans, self-insured employers and union trusts to use their de-identified claims data for the region's first public report on health care performance. The report will be for use by patients, doctors and others to seek, provide, pay for and reward effective, affordable health care.

Premera Blue Cross, Regence Blue Shield, Group Health Cooperative, Aetna and Molina Healthcare will provide data. In addition, several others have given approval for their de-identified health plan data to be included: The Boeing Company, Carpenters' Trust, City of Seattle, First Choice Health, King County, Recreational Equipment Inc (REI), Retail Clerks, Retail Drug Employees, Washington Mutual and the Washington State Health Care Authority (Uniform Medical Plan).

"Never before has this much data been compiled across the region to create a health care performance report useful for the whole community – and with this large volume of data comes greater confidence in the reliability of the results," said Ron Sims, Alliance Board Chair and executive of King County. "We are pleased to see so many willing to allow their data to be used for this report which is being funded initially through a special grant from the King County Council."

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The data being provided is “de-identified”, meaning that it does not include any information that identifies individual patients, such as name and address. Combined, the data reflect about 70% of the insured, non-Medicare population in King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Thurston counties.

The initial report, expected later in 2007, will compare aspects of the quality of care provided in local clinics and hospitals. The Alliance plans to update the report quarterly, and expand the report to cover additional measures and data suppliers over time. Data directly from Medicaid and eventually Medicare, as well as from other health plans, self-insured employers and union trusts are expected to be included in future reports. Milliman, Inc., a national actuarial and consulting firm working with the Health Alliance, has begun to collect and aggregate the data.

“The cooperation of self-insured employers, union trusts and health plans is critical to the success of this project,” said Margaret Stanley, executive director of the Puget Sound Health Alliance. “Our first report will give patients, doctors and others the most comprehensive view of the quality of health care in the region that we’ve ever had—and future reports will be even richer.”

The initial report is expected to include measures of care provided in the areas of: diabetes; heart disease; depression; low back pain; use of generic drugs; use of antibiotics; and, preventive care.

“This report will be a major step in improving the quality of patient care in the region. The report can be used by physicians to identify best practices for specific types of care and to help patients talk with doctors about effective care and to make more informed decisions,” said Dr. Hugh Straley, Alliance Board Vice Chair and President of Group Health Permanente.

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The initial report will use claims data to measure aspects of care. Physicians and others would like the reports to measure more aspects of clinical quality and health outcomes. In response to their recommendations, the Alliance plans to eventually add privacy-protected data from electronic medical records and care registries that are being used by a growing number of doctors and hospitals.

Since November, the Health Alliance, with help from the Washington State Medical Association and several other medical societies and specialty groups, has been gathering comments from physicians, health practitioners and others in the community on the proposed approach to developing the regional health care performance report. To give physicians time to check the results for reasonableness, the Alliance plans to release the results privately to physicians and other providers first, before finalizing the initial report for the public.

The Puget Sound Health Alliance (www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org) 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 almost one million covered individuals. For more information, including a list of participants, go to www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org.

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