

## Puget Sound Health Alliance Launching Patient Experience of Care Survey

*By: Susie Dade, Deputy Director, Puget Sound Health Alliance*

The Puget Sound Health Alliance – a regional health improvement collaborative of 165 organizations, including employers, union trusts, hospitals and medical groups, health plans, and consumers – is getting ready to launch the newest of its transparency initiatives this Fall. **Your Voice Matters** is a community-wide implementation of a survey that asks patients about their experiences of care. Patient experience is broadly recognized as a core element of health care quality. If we want to deliver on patient-centered care, we have to measure, understand and improve what patients value.

The Alliance plans to use the Clinician-Group Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey instrument, otherwise known as CG-CAHPS. The CG-CAHPS survey is part of a larger family of CAHPS surveys, developed and maintained by the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and is in the public domain. Endorsed by the National Quality Forum in 2007, the standardized CG-CAHPS survey is rapidly becoming the instrument of choice for multi-stakeholder collaboratives, health systems, and medical groups to evaluate and improve the care that patients receive.

We're interested in measuring experience, not satisfaction. Surveys that obtain ratings of patient satisfaction are measures of business loyalty that may be important but have little, if any, correlation with quality. The CG-CAHPS survey elicits feedback from patients about what they did or did not experience in their interactions with providers. The survey focuses on experiences in areas research has shown patients value and are tied to improved clinical outcomes, such as availability of easy-to-understand information, communication with clinicians, responsiveness of clinic staff, coordination between care providers, and ease of scheduling appointments.

The Alliance, now in its sixth year, has a proven track record of thoughtfully approaching performance measurement, including the 30+ measures of effective and appropriate ambulatory care on its *Community Checkup* website, as well as its more recent work on resource use and intensity of care in the hospital setting. Our approach to patient experience will be no different. The Alliance has very purposely selected a nationally standardized and validated survey tool. Measuring patient experience systematically is really very different from user-generated reviews, which can be based on a very small number of respondents and are too often written in the heat of the moment. By assessing a broader and more representative sample, we can provide more credible data for targeting improvement efforts.

The Alliance has undergone an extensive process to select an external vendor to manage the survey process for them. They have chosen the Center for the Study of Services (CSS), a nationally known vendor with significant experience in implementing CAHPS surveys. CSS is a certified vendor for both NCQA and CMS, and was the only vendor considered that has undergone a SAS 70 Type II Audit. This will be our first time doing this, so selecting a highly reputable and experienced vendor was a high priority. Also, working with an external vendor of this caliber will help us to assure the highest levels of patient

confidentiality. The Alliance is aiming to have the mail-based survey in the field no later than early October, with results available by March 2012. Physicians may be asked by their patients about the survey once it is launched; the purpose of this article is to alert physicians to the survey and give physicians the information needed to support patients' participation.

For this first round of surveying the Alliance plans to measure and publicly report patient experience with care delivered in approximately 220 primary care clinics of three or more providers in the Puget Sound region. It's expected that there will be completed surveys from approximately 35,000 patients. Results will be shared at the group or clinic level, rather than the individual provider level.

Many larger primary care practices, whether stand-alone or part of larger systems, gather feedback from patients. Last year, the Alliance surveyed medical groups in the Puget Sound area and asked them about what they do to understand and improve patient satisfaction or patient experience. From the results, we concluded a few things.

First, there are only two large medical practices measuring patient *experience* – most are still focused only on satisfaction. Second, both the survey tools used and the way they are implemented are all over the map. Simply compiling results from current survey efforts would be impossible and even if we could, it would leave out the many small to mid-size practices that are not currently fielding any survey. And finally, very few medical groups share any or all of their results – the good along with the bad – with the public.

The Alliance is striving to make comparable and credible information available publicly both to engage consumers and stimulate improvement. In other communities, such as Boston, where they have several years of experience implementing a community-wide patient experience survey, they have found differences as great as 36 percentage points in CG-CAHPS between the highest and lowest performing practices.

**Your Voice Matters** is an important step in creating greater transparency about patient experience of care. Public reporting of performance raises provider awareness of quality gaps and spurs efforts to improve. Providing consumers easy access to patient experience information empowers them to evaluate and communicate with providers about aspects of care that matter to them.

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