

## Improving Quality and Patient Safety: The QIO Approach

The nation's 40 Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) represent the largest, single federal investment in improving health care quality. Under contract to Medicare, QIOs work with thousands of hospitals and doctors around the country to help prevent disease, promote patient safety, and eliminate medical errors.

QIOs are helping save lives and reduce illness – not only for the millions of seniors and disabled people who rely on Medicare but for all patients who need care.

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### Working Cooperatively With Health Care Professionals

QIOs bring a range of resources and expertise to communities across the country to improve systems of delivering care. The QIO approach to quality improvement focuses on working hand in hand with local medical professionals and partnering with providers and patients to identify system-wide care problems and create workable solutions.

QIOs play a unique role to help ensure and improve quality of care:

- They provide health care professionals with technical support, mentoring, and education on redesigning delivery of care for better results.
- They help providers collect and publicly report data on quality performance that encourages providers to improve and gives consumers information to make health care decisions.
- They provide intensive training in specific areas of care such as treating congestive heart failure, promoting screening for breast cancer, and controlling diabetes.

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- They convene hospital teams for collaborative learning sessions on common problems, such as preventing surgical infections or managing pain for nursing home residents.

### Offering Targeted Assistance

In every state, QIOs enlist health care quality experts to work directly and cooperatively with hospitals and medical professionals to address the root causes of medical errors, and implement best practices to improve patient health and quality of life. This assistance is targeted at specific goals for improvement. For example, over the next three years, QIOs will:

- Help more than 5,000 primary care doctors adopt and implement electronic medical records. Help hundreds of hospitals adopt bar coding and electronic prescribing.
- Help thousands of physicians better address the health care needs of minorities.
- Help the new Medicare prescription drug plans ensure patients don't take drugs that interact.
- Help thousands of nursing homes fight pressure ulcers and depression among patients.

### Using One Patient's Experience to Improve Care for All

QIOs also respond to the concerns and needs of individual Medicare patients. For example, if a Medicare patient is not ready to leave the hospital, the patient can appeal the case to a QIO and request a review of the hospital's plan for discharge. In cases where patients feel they have not received adequate care, they can file a complaint with their QIO.

QIOs respond to a range of appeals and grievances by working with practitioners to undertake joint plans of action to improve problem areas.

Unlike state medical boards, they do not decide punishment for health care providers who violate professional standards. They refer valid complaints of substandard care to the appropriate authorities.

By conducting case reviews and complaint investigations, QIOs serve as the eyes and ears of Medicare. Looking at individual cases provides QIOs a unique perspective to help identify and fix systemic problems that affect care for all patients.

### An Approach That Pays Off

The proactive, educational QIO approach is producing significant results. For example, QIOs have:

- Increased the use of life-saving drugs for heart attack and congestive heart failure patients.
- Make surgery safer by reducing infection rates.
- Reduced hospital stays by getting needed antibiotics more quickly to pneumonia patients.
- Fought breast cancer by increasing the use of screening mammograms.
- Improved nursing home care by ensuring proper pain management, limiting use of physical restraints, and helping reduce staff turnover.

*The American Health Quality Association represents the national network of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) that work to encourage the spread of best clinical practices and improve systems of care delivery.*