

Helping the Nation With Health Services Research

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality • 2101 East Jefferson Street • Rockville, MD 20852



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AHRQ is the lead Federal agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, address patient safety and medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that provides evidence-based information on health care outcomes; quality; and cost, use, and access. The information helps health care decisionmakers—patients and clinicians, health system leaders, and policymakers—make more informed decisions and improve the quality of health care services.



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Health services research examines how people get access to health care, how much care costs, and what happens to patients as a result of this care. This fact sheet describes how findings from research supported by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is helping “typical” Americans with their health care.

Getting Better

Rosa, who is 60 years old, goes to a hospital emergency room with chest pains. She is evaluated and hooked up to an electrocardiograph (EKG) with a software instrument that was developed through AHRQ research. The instrument predicts the likelihood of a heart attack in patients admitted to the emergency room for chest pain.

Rosa is found to have had a heart attack and she is admitted to a cardiac care unit.

Her physicians receive a computerized reminder to prescribe a beta-blocker to relax her heart and reduce her chance of a second heart attack. This life-saving medicine is greatly underused and computerized reminders can assure that the right patients are prescribed beta-blockers.

When Rosa goes home, she is given information on a home-based cardiac rehabilitation program developed from AHRQ research. The program uses the Internet as the primary link between case manager, patient, and family member.

Preventing Illness

“Ed” goes to his primary doctor for a full physical exam. The *Guide to Clinical Preventive Services*, developed by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and AHRQ’s Put Prevention Into Practice (PIIP) program, helps the doctor assess which preventive services a patient needs based on age, sex, and risk factors.

Ed’s doctor also gives him an “Adult Health Guide,” developed by PIIP, so he can learn about and track his preventive care. As Ed is leaving the office he picks up another guide, “Staying Healthy at 50+,” to give to his parents so that they can learn more about tests and check-ups they might need as well tips on creating a healthy lifestyle.

The following day Ed takes his 5-year-old daughter “Lisa” for a check-up. Lisa’s doctor also uses the *Guide to Clinical Preventive Services* to help



determine when Lisa needs various screening tests and immunizations. The doctor gives Ed a PPIP “Child Health Guide” so he can easily keep track of when Lisa is due for these tests and shots.

Making Decisions

“Joe” has a prostate condition called benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH, a condition common to older men. The BPH Symptom Index, developed by AHRQ researchers, asks men if they are experiencing discomfort and limits on daily functioning as a result of an enlarged prostate. By asking the right questions, Joe can learn if he is suffering from BPH and make better decisions about his care.

Joe and his health care provider watch a BPH Shared Decisionmaking Program

video. This is an interactive, computer-assisted program that will help him decide on a treatment based on the risks and benefits of each treatment option.

Joe decides to use watchful waiting. So his doctor gives him information, based on AHRQ research, that discusses watchful waiting. This information helps him monitor his symptoms and report them to the physician.

For More Information

Health services research aims to identify the most effective ways to organize, manage, finance, and deliver high-quality care; reduce medical errors; and improve patient safety.

For more information on AHRQ and its health services research activities and programs, visit the AHRQ Web site at www.ahrq.gov.



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