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Closing the Quality Gap: A Critical Analysis of Quality Improvement Strategies

Volume 1—Series Overview and Methodology

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Preface

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), through its Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPCs), sponsors the development of evidence reports and technology assessments to assist public- and private-sector organizations in their efforts to improve the quality of health care in the United States. This report, *Closing the Quality Gap: A Critical Analysis of Quality Improvement Strategies,* was requested and funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The reports and assessments provide organizations with comprehensive, science-based information on common, costly medical conditions and new health care technologies. The EPCs systematically review the relevant scientific literature on topics assigned to them by AHRQ and conduct additional analyses when appropriate prior to developing their reports and assessments.

To bring the broadest range of experts into the development of evidence reports and health technology assessments, AHRQ encourages the EPCs to form partnerships and enter into collaborations with other medical and research organizations. The EPCs work with these partner organizations to ensure that the evidence reports and technology assessments they produce will become building blocks for health care quality improvement projects throughout the Nation. The reports undergo peer review prior to their release.

AHRQ expects that the EPC evidence reports and technology assessments will inform individual health plans, providers, and purchasers as well as the health care system as a whole by providing important information to help improve health care quality.

We welcome written comments on this evidence report. They may be sent to: Director, Center for Outcomes and Evidence, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 540 Gaither Road, Rockville, MD 20850.

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The views expressed are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The technical advisors and peer reviewers are not responsible for the accuracy of any of the content of this Volume.

Structured Abstract

Substantial evidence suggests that there is a wide gap between evidence-based best practices and those treatment practices actually used in day-to-day clinical medicine. To bring data to bear on this "quality gap" and the opportunities that exist to bridge it, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) engaged the Stanford–UCSF Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) to compile a critical analysis of the existing literature on quality improvement (QI) strategies for a selection of 20 disease and practice priorities identified in a 2003 Institute of Medicine report.

In Volume 1 of *Closing the Quality Gap*, we provide an overview of our methods and the theoretical underpinnings of the field, which we will rely on to review and analyze the literature on the quality gap in a number of the IOM-identified priority areas that will appear in subsequent volumes. We describe the genesis of the quality implementation field, providing some historical perspective on the science of translating research into practice. We then set forth our methodology: our reviews generally are restricted to studies that are likely to have strong validity (randomized controlled trials, well controlled before–after studies, and interrupted time series studies). To ensure consistency across our reviews, we introduce a taxonomy for nine QI strategies (provider reminder systems; facilitated relay of clinical data to providers; audit and feedback; provider education; patient education; promotion of self-management; patient reminders; organizational change; and financial, regulatory, or legislative incentives).

We hope the volumes in this series will be an essential source of accessible and critical analyses of the evidence regarding QI strategies that can help close the quality gap.

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