“Good quality” health care – what does this mean?

Getting good quality health care can help you stay healthy and recover faster when you are sick. But how do you know whether the care you get is good quality care?

When you get “good quality” health care, it means that your care is:

- **Based on the latest evidence from medical research about what types of care work best.** Each patient is different, but research has shown that some types of care tend to get better results than others. When medical evidence is available about what care works best for your condition, then using that evidence is part of “good quality” care.

- **Provided by skilled and knowledgeable professionals who give you personalized attention.** They treat you with respect, listen carefully, and give explanations you can understand. They take your values and preferences into account, and involve you in making decisions about your care.

- **Safe.** Most medical mistakes can be prevented. The care you get is supposed to help you – it should not cause harm.

- **Timely.** You can get the care you need when you need it.

You can’t take good quality care for granted

Most Americans believe that the health care they receive is the best that medicine and science can provide. Often people do get good quality care – care that works well to keep them healthy or to help them recover when they are sick or injured. But careful research shows that sometimes people do not get good quality care.
Research studies of patient care have shown that:

- **Some patients are receiving care that does not measure up to quality standards.** Here are just two examples of research studies that have shown serious problems with quality of care:
  
  - Over 90,000 Americans with conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease die each year because they don’t receive the type of care that research has shown to work best for their condition. For details, see *The Essential Guide to Health Care Quality* and *State of Health Care Quality* by the National Committee for Quality Assurance ([www.ncqa.org/tabid/203/Default.aspx](http://www.ncqa.org/tabid/203/Default.aspx)).
  
  - A major study of 12 large U.S. communities done in 2004 and reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that nearly half of the people in these communities were not getting the care that is recommended for their condition.

- **An alarming number of mistakes are made each year** – mistakes that injure patients and waste health care resources. For example, a 2006 report from the Institute of Medicine says that medication errors are among the most common medical errors. These errors harm at least 1.5 million people every year. According to the report, it costs more than 3.5 billion dollars per year to treat hospital patients who are injured by medication errors. For more about this, visit the website of the Institute of Medicine for the report called *Preventing Medication Errors* ([www.iom.edu/Reports/2006/Preventing-Medication-Errors-Quality-Chasm-Series.aspx](http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2006/Preventing-Medication-Errors-Quality-Chasm-Series.aspx)).

**Health care providers are working to improve quality of care**

Doctors, hospitals, health plans, and other health care organizations in the United States are working hard to improve the quality of care they give to patients and help prevent mistakes.

- One of the best ways to improve patient safety is to set up systems and procedures that make human errors much less likely to happen. For example, when medicine containers have bar codes, pharmacists and hospital staff can scan the bar code to be sure they are giving the right dose of the right medicine to the right patient. For more examples of what is being done to help prevent medical errors, visit [www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/](http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/).
What is ABC Toy Company doing?

To help make sure that you and other employees are getting good quality care, we have asked our three health plans to give us quality reports. These reports tell what our health plans are doing to measure, safeguard, and improve the quality of the care they provide to our employees.

What can you do to help make sure you are getting good quality care?

Once you understand that quality of health care does vary, it’s clear that you can’t take good quality care for granted. To help make sure that you and your family get good quality care, you will need to be actively involved in finding and using information that tells about health care quality. [NOTE: if you want to include the sample photo shown below in your own materials, see the easy instructions and rules that apply to photo use in the “How to use the materials” section of the Toolkit website.]

“I’m happy with our family doctor and haven’t had problems, so I was surprised and concerned to find out how much quality of care can differ from one doctor or hospital to the next.

I want the best for my family, so now I’m getting more involved in health care decisions that affect us.”

Finding and using information about quality of care can help you stay healthy and help you make good decisions about treatment when you get sick. Below are resources that tell more about what you can do to help make sure that you and your family are getting good quality care.

A booklet called Guide to Health Care Quality: How to Know It When You See It is available from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality ([www.ahrq.gov/consumer/guidetoq/]).

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the text that follows. The two documents it refers to are available to you as part of the Toolkit] Look for these tip sheets at the employee website ([employees.com/healthinfo]):

- “Information about health care quality: what it is and where to find it.”
- “How you can use information about health care quality to get better care: Seven examples.”
What is care that “works best”?

Health care that “works best” is care that gets the best results for your health, is safe, and uses health care resources in the most efficient ways. It’s the type of care you want for yourself and your family.

Medical scientists do research to find out which care works best

To find out what types of care work best, doctors and others do scientific studies of patient care. The results from this medical research are called “medical evidence.”

Each patient is different, but medical research can show whether some types of health care tend to get better results than others for patients with certain conditions. When there is medical evidence from research that shows which care works best, then using that evidence is part of “good quality” care.
How do we know which types of health care works best?

What kinds of questions can medical evidence answer?

Medical evidence from research answers questions such as these:

- **What works best for keeping people healthy?** This includes finding out what works best to prevent health problems and what works best to keep diseases from returning.
- **What works best for catching problems at an early stage when treatment can be more effective?**
- **What tests are best for finding out what’s wrong?**
- **Which treatments help the most and have the fewest side effects?** Some studies collect evidence on experimental treatments, new drugs, or new approaches to surgery, physical therapy, or radiation therapy. Other studies collect medical evidence on the best ways to improve comfort and the quality of life for people with long-term medical conditions.

*NOTE: if you want to include the sample photo shown below in your own materials, see the note on page 1 about using the sample photos.*

“Times have changed since I was in medical school. There are so many new tests and treatments now and we’ve learned so much from research about which types of care work best.

To learn about the latest research, I read the main medical journals. I also get updates on research studies when I go to medical meetings.

When something comes up with a patient, I sometimes check to see if there is any new evidence from research studies that might be helpful.”

Some cautions about medical evidence

Medical evidence tells what we know right now about what types of care work best for certain types of patients with certain conditions. There are limitations to the evidence that is currently available and there is always more to learn. For example:

- **Some types of conditions and care have been studied, but others have not.** This means that medical research does not always have an answer about which kind of care works best.
- **Depending on how the research was done, the medical evidence might apply to some patients but not others.** For example, evidence that was collected by studying male patients may not apply to female patients. Evidence that comes from studies of adults may not apply to children’s care.
• **Medical evidence is always being updated.** Every year, medical research studies are done throughout the world. These studies produce an enormous amount of medical evidence. As researchers do more studies, they learn new things that can cause them to change their conclusions about what works best. This means that medical evidence is always changing and improving.

**Using medical evidence to set standards for quality of patient care**

When there is enough medical evidence to know what types of care work best, this evidence can be used to set “quality standards” or “guidelines” for good patient care. Care that follows these standards or guidelines is sometimes called “evidence-based care” because it is based on the evidence that comes from medical research.

• **Quality standards for patient care are created by groups of doctors who are national experts in their field.** To create quality standards, doctors do a careful review of the results from many scientific studies of patient care.

• **Quality standards are created only when doctors feel that there is enough good evidence** from enough carefully designed research studies to say that a particular type of care works best. An example is shown below.

**EXAMPLE OF A QUALITY STANDARD:**

**Getting an antibiotic at the right time before surgery**

Antibiotics are drugs that help prevent and treat infections.

• Research shows that surgery patients who get antibiotics within one hour before their operation are less likely to get an infection of their surgical wound.

• The timing for when patients are given the antibiotic is important. Research shows that the antibiotic does not work as well if patients get it too far in advance or if they get it after their surgery begins.

Therefore, a quality standard for surgery is to make sure surgery patients get an antibiotic at the *right time*, which means getting the antibiotic within one hour before surgery begins.
Here are some things to know about quality standards:

- **Quality standards have been set for some types of care but not for others.** Sometimes standards are not set because there has not been enough research yet or the results from research have been weak or inconsistent. Sometimes standards are not set because experts disagree about what medical evidence means and how to use it for making decisions about health care.

- **Quality standards can change.** Since quality standards are based on the latest medical research, they can change. When new evidence is available, the standards are updated.

**Health professionals can use quality standards as guidelines for giving good quality care**

Doctors and other health professionals can use quality standards as guidelines to help give you good quality care. When doctors use the quality standards as guidelines, it is sometimes called using “best practices” for patient care.

**NOTE: if you want to include the sample photo shown below in your own materials, see the note on page 1 about using the sample photos.**

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“To give my patients with asthma the best possible care, I follow the national quality guidelines for patients with asthma.

These guidelines are based on medical research that was reviewed by leading asthma specialists.

I have a chart that lists all of the guidelines. It’s a handy reminder about all the things that need to happen for good asthma care.”
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To give patients the best care, doctors use their training, experience, and personal medical judgment. **Each patient is different, and doctors take this into account when they use guidelines for quality care.**

- Guidelines are helpful to doctors because they tell what care has been found to work the best for most patients.

- Guidelines are based on good scientific research, but they cannot cover every situation for every patient. In the end, it is up to you and your doctor to decide what care is best for you.
How do we know which types of health care works best?

What can you do to help make sure you are getting good quality care?

It’s important to know that getting good quality care does not happen automatically. While you might tend to assume that all patient care is good quality care, research studies have shown that some care does not measure up to quality standards. [NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the sentence that follows. The document it refers to is available to you as part of the Toolkit.] For more about this, look for the document titled “Good quality health care: what it is and why you can’t take it for granted” at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo/).

To help make sure that you and your family are getting the care that works best for your condition, you will need to be informed and involved. Below are two examples of what you can do to help make sure you are getting good quality care:

1. You can check to see if the care you are getting is the care that is known to work best

Some information about quality guidelines has been written specifically for patients. You can use this information to check on the care you have been getting.

- For example, a brochure might tell what screening tests and other care you should be getting if you have an ongoing condition such as diabetes, asthma, or heart disease.
- There is also information that compares different treatments and tells which ones work best for certain conditions. This information often includes references to the research studies that were done.

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the sentence that follows and the two bulleted points under it. The two documents listed in the bulleted points are available to you as part of the Toolkit.] Look for the following documents at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo):

- “Information about health care quality: what it is and where to find it.”
- “A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information.”

The federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has produced summaries for patients that tell about effective health treatments for selected conditions (http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov). These summaries are based on expert reviews of medical research.
Cochrane Collaboration is an international not-for-profit and independent organization that reviews medical research studies about health care treatments. The website www.cochrane.org has easy-to-understand summaries of the findings of its reviews in the Cochrane Library.

A government website (www.guideline.gov) with technical medical information for health professionals includes some links to resources that are written for patients. Click on Guideline Resources and then click on Patient Education Materials.

2. You can use public reports to compare the quality of health plans, hospitals, and other health care providers

If you need to choose a health plan, hospital, nursing home, medical group, or other health care provider organization, there might be a report with information that lets you make quality comparisons. Often, these reports include information that lets you compare health care provider organizations to see how well they are doing at giving patients the types of health care that has been shown to work best.

- One purpose of these public reports with quality comparisons is to give you information to help you decide where to get your care.
- Another purpose is to encourage health care providers to improve the quality of care they provide.

Most public reports with quality comparisons are produced by state or federal government agencies or by large business groups or health care coalitions. They are typically on websites and some are available as printed reports. They are sometimes called quality report cards, quality score cards, or performance reports.

“Hospital Compare” is an example of a report with quality comparisons

The government website called Hospital Compare (www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov) has quality information on hospitals throughout the United States.

- You can use this website to compare the quality of hospitals within a state, county, city, or zip code.
- Using information from patients’ hospital records, Hospital Compare shows how well each hospital is doing at providing the care that is known to work best for patients with certain medical conditions. An example is shown below.
How do we know which types of health care works best?

NOTE: It can be hard for employees to find quality reports on their own. You can help by compiling a list for them that shows the reports that have information on quality of local health care provider organizations. If you prepare such a list, you can replace the sample placeholder text in the paragraph that follows with company-specific information about the list. Otherwise, delete the paragraph that follows.

To help you find reports with quality comparisons for health care organizations in the local area, the Human Resources Department at ABC Toy Company has prepared a Directory of reports that show quality comparisons of health plans, hospitals, and medical groups in our community. To see this directory, visit the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo).

Besides Hospital Compare, here are other government websites with quality comparisons:

- For nursing home care: www.medicare.gov/NHCompare
- For home health care www.medicare.gov/HHCompare
- For kidney dialysis facilities: www.medicare.gov/dialysis

EXAMPLE: USING A QUALITY STANDARD TO MAKE COMPARISONS

The federal government’s Hospital Compare website shows how well hospitals are doing at making sure heart failure patients get instructions on how to care for themselves when they leave the hospital.

This website shows that on average, for hospitals throughout the country, only 78% of heart failure patients were being given instructions for their care when they left the hospital.

- Some of the hospitals have much better quality scores (scores that are much higher than 78%).
- Some of the hospitals have much lower quality scores (scores that are much lower than 78%).

To find out how well a particular hospital did on this quality standard and other quality standards for hospital care, visit the website at www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov.
What is “good quality” health care?

Good quality health care is the kind of care you want for yourself and your family. “Good quality” means that you get your care from skilled and knowledgeable health professionals who communicate clearly and involve you in decisions about your care. It means that you are given the type of care that medical research has shown to work best for your condition. Good quality also means that your care is safe and timely, and that you are able to get as much care as you need (but no unnecessary care).

While it may surprise you, it’s true that some health care is good quality care, but other care is not. Scientific research studies of patient care have found that some patients are getting care that does not meet nationally accepted standards for quality of care. [NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the text that follows. The tip sheet it refers to is available to you as part of the Toolkit] (For more about variations in quality of care, look for this tip sheet at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo): “Good quality health care: what it is and why you can’t take it for granted.”)

To help make sure that you and your family get good quality care, you can find and use information about health care quality.

What kinds of information can you use to help make sure you are getting good quality health care?

1 Information that tells which types of care have been shown to work best

To find out what types of care work best, doctors and others do scientific studies of patient care. The results from this medical research can show which tests are best for finding out what’s wrong and which treatments help the most and have the fewest side effects. Medical
research can also show what works best for catching problems at an early stage when
treatment can be more effective and what works best to help keep diseases from returning.

Results from research on patient care are published in medical journals and shared in other
ways. When there is enough solid medical research to show that a particular approach works
best, these results are sometimes used to create standards or guidelines for quality of care.
Health professionals can use these guidelines for quality of care to help make sure they are
giving their patients the care that works the best.

Most information about results from research on patient care is written for health
professionals and it is often quite technical. But some information about which types of
care work best has been written specifically for patients. You can use this information to
help make decisions about your care. You can also use this information to check on whether
the care you are being given is the care that has been shown to work best. Here are examples
of the types of information you can use:

- There are brochures that tell what screening tests and other care you should be
  getting if you have a condition such as diabetes, asthma, or heart disease.
- There are summaries of research results written for patients. These compare different
treatments and tell which ones have been shown to work best for certain conditions.
  This information often includes references to the research studies that were done.

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the sentence that follows. The tip sheet
it refers to is available to you as part of the Toolkit] Look for the following
tip sheet at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo):
“A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health
information.”

The federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has
produced summaries for patients that tell about effective health
treatments for selected conditions
(http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/). These summaries are based
on expert reviews of medical research.

Cochrane Collaboration is an international not-for-profit and
independent organization that reviews medical research studies
about healthcare treatments. The website www.cochrane.org has
easy-to-understand summaries of the findings of its reviews in the
Cochrane Library.

A government website (www.guideline.gov) with technical medical
information for health professionals includes some links to
resources that are written for patients. Click on Guideline Resources
and then click on Patient Education Materials.
Some information about health care quality comes directly from patients themselves, usually from surveys of patients that ask them about the care they have received. **Patients are the best or only source of certain information about quality of care**, such as how well their doctors listen and explain, and how easy it is for patients to get the care they need.

As explained later on, results from patient surveys are sometimes included in reports of quality comparisons that are available to the public. When you are choosing a health plan, hospital, or other health care provider, the results from surveys of patients can help you compare your choices.

(NOTE: if you want to include the sample photo shown below in your own materials, see the easy instructions and rules that apply to photo use in the “How to use the materials” section of the Toolkit website.)

"I had an emergency operation last month – they took out my appendix. After I was home from the hospital, a survey company called to ask about my hospital stay. Mostly I had good things to say about my care. But when they asked what happened when I rang the call button, I said I often had to wait a long time before someone came to help. And when they asked how often nurses explained my medicines before giving them to me, I said that they usually didn’t. Doing this survey made me think about what good quality care means when you’re in the hospital. If I’m in the hospital again, I’m going to ask more questions and say something right away if there are any problems."

To help judge the quality of doctors or other health professionals, you can consider their training, experience, and other qualifications. For example, some doctors get extra training in their field and pass tests to become “board certified.”
The following resources can help you find information about the qualifications of doctors and other health professionals:

- For information about licensed doctors in the United States, visit the website of the American Medical Association. Click on For patients to access DoctorFinder (www.ama-assn.org).
- For information from state government licensing boards on the licensing background and disciplinary information of doctors and other health care providers, click on DocFinder at www.docboard.org.

There are independent non-profit organizations that use specific quality standards to do careful reviews and inspections of health plans, hospitals, nursing homes, and home health agencies throughout the country. These reviews cover such things as qualifications of the health care providers, quality of care received by patients, and systems that are used to help protect patient safety and privacy.

Some of the organizations that do reviews give a “seal of approval” by accrediting the health plans, hospitals, or other health care organizations that pass the review. Others issue inspection reports that give the details on the types of problems that were found. Knowing the results from these reviews and inspections can help you make quality comparisons.

To learn how reviews and inspections of health care organizations are conducted and to see the results, visit the following websites:

- The Joint Commission (www.jointcommission.org).

For information about the quality of nursing home care, including inspection reports, visit www.medicare.gov/NHCompare.

If you need to choose a health plan, hospital, nursing home, medical group, or other health care provider organization, there might be a report with information that lets you make quality comparisons.

Most reports with quality comparisons are produced by state or federal government agencies or by large business groups or health care coalitions. They are typically on websites and some are available as printed reports. They are sometimes called quality report cards, quality score cards, or health care performance reports.
The type of quality comparisons included depends on the report. For example, a report might let you compare health care professionals or health care organizations based on:

- How well they are doing at giving patients the types of health care that work best, based on results from research on patient care.
- Feedback from patients about the care they have received.
- Qualifications and experience of those who provide the care.

To help you make good decisions about health care, government websites provide a number of reports with quality comparisons, including the ones listed below. You can use these websites to compare the quality of care within a state, county, city, or zip code.

- For hospital care: [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)
- For nursing home care: [www.medicare.gov/NHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare)
- For home health care: [www.medicare.gov/HHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/HHCompare)
- For kidney dialysis facilities: [www.medicare.gov/dialysis](http://www.medicare.gov/dialysis)

Visit the website for the National Committee for Quality Assurance ([www.ncqa.org](http://www.ncqa.org)). Click on *report cards* for a variety of information about health care quality that includes quality comparisons of health plans, doctors, and more.

The government has produced a national directory of quality reports called the *Report Card Compendium*. You can search this database which has more than 200 reports of comparative information on the quality of health plans, hospitals, medical groups, individual physicians, nursing homes, and other providers of health care ([www.talkingquality.gov/content/reportcard/search.aspx](http://www.talkingquality.gov/content/reportcard/search.aspx)).

**NOTE:** It can be hard for employees to find quality reports on their own. You can help by compiling a list for them that shows the reports that have information on quality of local health care provider organizations. If you prepare such a list, you can replace the sample placeholder text in the paragraph that follows with company-specific information about the list. Otherwise, delete the paragraph that follows.

To help you find reports with quality comparisons for health care organizations in the local area, the Human Resources Department at ABC Toy Company has prepared a *Directory of reports that show quality comparisons of health plans, hospitals, and medical groups in our community*. To see this directory, visit the employee website ([employees.com/healthinfo](http://employees.com/healthinfo)).
Tips on how to find information about health care quality

Ask your doctor and other health care professionals and organizations

Your doctors and other health professionals might have patient education materials for you. You can also ask for their suggestions about where to find information related to quality of care. For example:

- You can ask where to find information about the quality of care guidelines that apply to your medical conditions.
- When there are treatment choices to consider, ask where you can find information to help you understand your condition and information with medical evidence to help make your treatment decisions.

Other sources for information about health care quality include Member Services at your health plan, hospitals in your community, and the non-profit organizations that focus on particular health conditions (such as the American Diabetes Association). Ask if they have information about quality of care for your condition.

Look on websites (to be sure the information is trustworthy, choose your websites carefully)

[NOTE: if you want to include the sample photo shown below in your own materials, see the note on page 3 about using the sample photos.]

“...When we first started looking for health information on the internet, we found some websites that made us suspicious. They sold products and promised miracle cures. When they gave health information, there was nothing to back it up.

Then we found a website run by the national Medical Library Association with tips on how to evaluate websites (www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html). It even has the librarians’ own favorites --a “top ten” list of health information websites for consumers.

Now we stick to websites that are run by the government, non-profit organizations, and some of the leading medical centers. We know they have information we can trust.”
Websites can be a great source of information about health care and quality of care. There are thousands of websites with health information and opinions. However, the internet is not regulated, and this means that anyone can put anything they like on a website. To make sure that the information you find is reliable and up-to-date, you need to be very careful about which websites you use.

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the paragraph that follows. The two tips sheets it refers to are available to you as part of the Toolkit.] To help find websites that offer trustworthy health information that is based on solid medical research, look for the following tips sheets at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo):

- “Health information on the internet: A checklist to help you judge which websites to trust.”
- “A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information.”

Many types of information about health care quality are available at libraries, and you can ask a librarian to help you look up the information you need.

Public libraries also have computers you can use to visit websites that have health information. If you need help on how to use a computer to get information from a website, a librarian can show you how.
How you can use information about health care quality to get better care:

SEVEN EXAMPLES

1. Using information about quality to help make decisions about which treatment is best

"I was very upset and discouraged when my doctor gave me the bad news about cancer. I had so many questions and concerns.

The nurse at my doctor’s office told me about a guide on a government website called *Next Steps After Your Diagnosis: Finding Information and Support*. I found it at [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/diaginfo.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/diaginfo.htm). It has a step-by-step approach on what to do, and lots of places to find good information.

I found information that helped me understand my type of cancer. It told about research on what kinds of treatment seem to work the best, and I talked it over with my doctor.

I was glad I took the time to look up that information. Otherwise, I might have rushed into doing something that wasn’t right for me."
If you are sick, you want to get care that is based on the latest medical evidence about what types of care work best. You can play an active role in your health care by seeking information that tells about your condition and about what diagnostic tests and treatments work best. This information will help you understand your choices and be better prepared to talk about them with your doctor.

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the sentence that follows and the three bulleted points underneath. The three documents listed in the bulleted points are available to you as part of the Toolkit]

Look for these resources at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo):

- “How do we know which types of health care work best?”
- “Health information on the internet: A checklist to help you judge which websites to trust.”
- “A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information.”

The U.S. government Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has produced summaries for patients that tell about effective health treatments for selected conditions (http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/). These summaries are based on expert reviews of medical research.

Cochrane Collaboration is an international not-for-profit and independent organization that reviews medical studies about health care treatments. The website www.cochrane.org has summaries of the findings of its reviews in the Cochrane Library.

Look for this booklet at a website sponsored by the National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/takingtime): “Taking Time: Support for People with Cancer.” Written for people with cancer and their families, it discusses feelings and concerns, and offers suggestions for coping.
Scientific studies of patient care are done to find out which types of treatment work well for a particular condition and which do not. Every year, new medical research studies are done and there can be updates to what is known about which treatments work best.

Sometimes there are surprises. For example, research might show that a widely used treatment is not actually effective. When this happens, treatment recommendations can change. There’s an example below.

“When my son got an ear infection, I was expecting that he would be on antibiotics, but the doctor said no, he doesn’t need them. I couldn’t believe it at first. The doctor said there’s been research and now the recommended treatment for ear infections has changed. They used to use antibiotics for most ear infections, but now they don’t. The doctor gave me a brochure. It says that most ear infections are caused by viruses, and antibiotics won’t help. And if you take antibiotics too often when you don’t need them, then antibiotics don’t work as well later on when you really do need them.”

Knowing which treatments work well and which do not can help you stay away from treatments that do not work well. If there is evidence from patient research that shows a certain treatment won’t help you get better, then why waste your time and money on that treatment?

To learn more about when antibiotics are needed and when they are not, visit the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (often called “the CDC”). This website includes an information series called “Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work” at www.cdc.gov/getsmart/.
If you are having surgery, be sure that you understand why the surgery is needed and what you should expect – before, during, and after the operation.

- Since most operations are not emergencies, you will usually have time to learn about your operation to be sure it is the best treatment for you.
- You also have time to choose a good surgeon and work with your surgeon to make the surgery as safe as possible.

Here are resources to help you get good quality surgical care that is as safe as possible:


- The website of the American College of Surgeons has patient information ([www.facs.org/public_info/ppserv.html](http://www.facs.org/public_info/ppserv.html)). Topics include choosing a surgeon, getting a second opinion, questions to ask when you are having surgery, and information about a number of common operations.

- For a series of patient safety brochures on topics that include how to prevent mistakes in surgery and medical tests, visit [www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp](http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/SpeakUp).

- The federal government website called *Hospital Compare* ([www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)) has information about the quality of hospitals throughout the United States. This includes surgical infection rates and other information relevant for hospital patients who have surgery.
How you can use information about health care quality to get better care: 7 examples

4 Using information about quality to see if your care meets the standards for good quality care

“I have diabetes, and I thought I was doing everything I should do to stay healthy. Then I read a booklet with standards of good quality care for people with diabetes. I found out that I wasn’t getting some tests I need to have as often as I should. So I made an appointment right away. Now I’m up to date on everything. I’m even keeping track of all my tests on a wallet card. I don’t want to fall behind again. My health is too important.”

If you have an ongoing medical condition such as asthma, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, or high blood pressure, then you know it’s especially important to look after your health.

Much research has been done to find ways to help people with ongoing conditions stay as healthy as possible. The results from this research have been used to set quality of care standards for people with ongoing conditions. These guidelines tell what types of care you should be getting to catch problems at an early stage and prevent serious complications.

If you have an ongoing health condition, you’ll want to be sure that the care you are getting follows these guidelines for quality care. This means finding and using information about the quality standards for your condition.

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the sentence that follows and the two bulleted points under the sentence. The two documents listed in the bulleted points are available to you as part of the Toolkit] Look for these tip sheets at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo):

- “Good quality care: what it is and why you can’t take it for granted.”
- “Information about health care quality: what it is and where to find it.”
“My doctor showed me statistics on how being overweight can lead to big health problems -- that got my attention. Then he gave me advice about healthy eating and sent me to some government websites. One of them has a Body Mass Index calculator that’s quick and easy to use (www.cdc.gov). The one I like best is the “Portion Distortion Quiz” on the website of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. It shows how portion sizes of some common foods have become a lot bigger over the years (http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/). It made me realize what huge helpings I’m used to eating.”

The U.S Preventative Services Task Force (http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm) has used evidence from research to set guidelines for screening tests, preventive medicine, and healthy lifestyle behaviors. These guidelines tell what you can do to help stay healthy.

- The guidelines are shown in a new pocket-size brochure called Stay Healthy at Any Age, Your Checklist for Health. The brochure is in English and Spanish, with separate versions for women and men. You can get these brochures from a government website run by the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research (www.ahrq.gov/clinic/ppipix.htm) or by calling 1-800-358-9295.
- The brochures give you the details about which screening tests you need and when you need them. They have a chart to help you keep track of the tests you’ve had and to plan for when you will need them again.
- The brochures also have tips about other things to do to stay healthy, such as eating a healthy diet and exercising.
“When I moved, I had to find a new doctor. A neighbor told me about a government website at [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/qualcare.html](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/qualcare.html) that tells things to consider when you’re picking a doctor. It also tells how to look up a doctor’s training and experience.

When I had the names of several doctors who looked promising, I took the website’s advice and called their offices. I used a list of questions from the website to ask about certain things that are important to me.

There were such big differences. One office said that waiting time for routine appointments was at least six weeks, and that didn’t sound good. Another office said that if I wanted to talk about test results, I’d have to make an appointment – they wouldn’t do it over the phone. But another office had regular call-in hours set aside for patients so they could talk with a nurse or maybe even with the doctor.

It took some time and a bit of courage to make those calls, but I was glad I did. I found a new doctor I’m very happy with.”

The following resources can help you find information about the qualifications of doctors and other health professionals:

- For information about licensed doctors in the United States, visit the website of the American Medical Association. Click on “DoctorFinder” in the Featured Resources section ([www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)).

- For information from state government licensing boards on the licensing background and disciplinary information of doctors and other health care providers, click on “DocFinder Searches” at [www.docboard.org](http://www.docboard.org).
“The doctor said my father needed to be in a nursing home, so it was up to me to find a good one. I didn’t know where to start.

The doctor said I should look at a website called “Nursing Home Compare” at www.medicare.gov/NHcompare. It’s run by the government and so helpful. There’s a checklist on what to look for when you visit a nursing home and questions you should ask. It has quality ratings for each nursing home. It even has the results from official inspection reports of each nursing home.

When I was using this website, I saw that the nursing home my friends had recommended didn’t do well on the quality ratings. So I kept looking and I found a better one. It’s for my father, after all. I want him to have the very best care.”

For reports with quality comparisons, visit the following government websites where you can compare the quality of care within a state, county, city, or zip code.

- For hospital care: www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov
- For nursing home care: www.medicare.gov/NHCompare (this website is described in the example above)
- For home health care: www.medicare.gov/HHCompare
- For kidney dialysis facilities: www.medicare.gov/dialysis

NOTE: It can be hard for employees to find quality reports on their own. You can help by compiling a list for them that shows the reports that have information on quality of local health care provider organizations. If you prepare such a list, you can replace the sample placeholder text in the paragraph that follows with company-specific information about the list. Otherwise, delete the paragraph that follows.] To help find reports with quality comparisons for health care organizations in the local area, look for this directory on the employee website (www.employees.com/healthinfo) Directory of reports that show quality comparisons of health plans, hospitals, and medical groups in our community.
What does it mean to get good quality health care?

When you get good quality health care, it means that your care is:

- **Provided by skilled and knowledgeable professionals who give you personalized attention.** They treat you with respect, listen carefully, give explanations you can understand, and involve you in decisions about your care.

- **Based on the lastest evidence from medical research about what types of care work best.** Each patient is different, but research has shown that some types of care tend to get better results than others.

- **Safe.** Most medical mistakes can be prevented.

- **Timely.** You can get the care you need when you need it.

What can you do to help make sure you are getting good quality care?

Look for information, ask questions, and play an active part in all decisions that affect your health.

**Tip #1: Use information about quality to help choose a doctor, hospital, or nursing home.** Look at quality reports to help you compare the quality of health care providers.

**Tip #2: Check to make sure you are getting the care that is known to work best for your condition.** Ask your doctor or other health provider about your treatment choices and whether any research has been done to find out which treatments work best.

**Tip #3: Be informed and involved to get care that is as safe as possible.** Ask about the risks of treatment choices and learn what you can do to help prevent medical mistakes.

**Tip #4: Use information about quality to keep up to date on preventive care and help stay healthy.** Follow guidelines for screening tests, preventive medicine, and healthy lifestyle behaviors.

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**Resources to help you**

- **Hospital quality reports**  
  [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)

- **Nursing home quality reports**  
  [www.medicare.gov/NHCompare](http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare)

- **Medline Plus**  
  [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)  
  Up-to-date information about diseases, conditions, and treatments

- **Five Steps to Safer Health Care: Patient Fact Sheet**  
  [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/5steps.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/5steps.htm)

- **Stay Healthy at Any Age, Your Checklist for Health**  
  [www.ahrq.gov/clinic/ppipix.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/ppipix.htm)

- **Quick Guide to Healthy Living**  
  [www.healthfinder.gov/prevention](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention)