City of Albuquerque Health Tips

Good quality health care:
What it is and why you can't take it for granted

This document is part of a series of information resources provided by Aligning Forces For Quality (AF4Q) to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit the employee benefits section of the [City's website.](#)

"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).

  - 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).

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/.

What is the City of Albuquerque doing?

To help make sure that you and other employees are getting good quality care, we have asked Presbyterian Health Plan 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.

"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/).

Look for this tip sheet at the employee benefits section of the City's website

- "Information about health care quality: what it is and where to find it."