

*Editorial***LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR RURAL RESIDENTS**

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Editor

What is quality in health care? In 1990 the Institute of Medicine (IOM) defined quality of care as the degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with current professional knowledge (Institute of Medicine, 2005, p.4)

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) was established in the United States, in 1970 by the National Academy of Sciences to secure the services of eminent members of appropriate professions in the examination of policy matters pertaining to the health of the public. The Institute acts under the responsibility given to the National Academy of Sciences by its congressional charter to be an adviser to the federal government and, upon its own initiative, to identify issues of medical care, research, and education. The Institute has had a long-standing focus on quality of care. In the first phase of the IOM quality initiative, the National Roundtable on Health Care Quality highlighted serious problems with the overall quality of care delivered in the United States. In the second phase, two reports, *To ERR is Human: Building a safer Health System* and *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*, were released. Both reports called for a fundamental redesign of the health care delivery system (Institute of Medicine, 2005).

In the third and current phase, the IOM has sought to elaborate and to realize the vision of a future health systems set forth in the *Quality Chasm* report. *The Quality Chasm* report identified six aims for the delivery of health care: care should be safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable. Among the profound changes needed to achieve these aims are that information technology must play a central role in support of the delivery of care; that provider payment systems must reward the provision of quality care; and that the education and training of health professionals must encompass evidence-based skills and working in interdisciplinary teams (Institute of Medicine, 2005).

The issue of quality in health care is not unique to the United States. Indeed, this issue has been discussed for the past several decades in almost every country in the world. Most of these discussions have focused on large systems of care in the large cities with the focus on procedures, encounters and financial implications. That has certainly been true in the United States. Indeed, rural providers had largely been left out of the quality discussion. Much of what had been developed and published was irrelevant to rural providers and in reality resources had been shifted from the rural areas to support this new initiative.

Recently the National Academy Press published another report in its *Quality* series. This one is on Rural Health Care. It is titled *Quality Through Collaboration: The Future of Rural Health*. With the release of this report rural health care providers had a

unique opportunity to lead the quality movement to new levels of effectiveness. We must engage!!

The report provides us with a rural quality conceptual framework that includes: Collaboration, Continuity, Communication, Community, and the IOM six aims of health care: safe, timely, patient-centered effective, efficient, and equitable. Using this framework the report summarizes almost all the rural health care issues of the past two decades and introduces new insights and recommendations on workforce issues, quality improvement infrastructure, finance, and health information and communication technology.

The report advocates development of rural systems of care designed for high quality and realizing the goals of health care. It demonstrates how the rural sector can exert quality leadership and advance the national quality improvement movement. It opens the door to rural engagement of the national “quality establishment” that has not been in the past. And maybe most important, it creates new opportunities for resources for quality health care in rural America. It is a report that every rural health professional should be familiar with and use to support quality health care initiatives. The report can be accessed at <http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=23359>.

REFERENCE

Institute of Medicine. (2005). *Quality through collaboration: The future of rural health*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved January 25, 2005, from <http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=23359>