

Where Quality and Healthcare Meet: National Quality Strategy Lays Groundwork for Quality Efforts

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By Lisa Brooks Taylor, RHIA

As involved members of the healthcare industry, health information management (HIM) professionals can envision a future state of healthcare that is effective, safe, accessible and affordable. The National Quality Strategy (NQS), developed through the National Quality Forum (NQF), presents the opportunity for HIM and other healthcare professionals to work cooperatively from a coordinated, cohesive strategy that aims to make high quality healthcare a national reality.

A successful strategy is important for HIM professionals and the industry because it sets a direction, defining clear and simple long-term goals that are capable of motivating effort. It channels resources, efforts, and enthusiasm in an agreed direction. A successful strategy supports direction and focus over time while retaining flexibility through continuous assessment and necessity for revision.¹

Quality Strategy Priorities

The NQS consists of three basic aims:

- Better care
- Healthy people and communities
- Affordable care

The work to achieve these aims is focused on six priorities:

- Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care
- Ensuring that each person and/or family are engaged as partners in their care
- Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
- Promoting the most effective prevention and treatment practices for the leading causes of mortality, starting with cardiovascular
- Working with communities to promote wide use of best practices to enable healthy living
- Making quality care more affordable for individuals, families, employers, and governments by developing and spreading new healthcare delivery models

With funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), NQF convened the National Priorities Partnership (NPP)-a collaborative of 52 major national organizations that “collectively influence every part of the healthcare system.”² Using a consensus-development process, the NPP worked from 2008 to 2011 to develop the NQS. The NPP work continues today, facilitating connections across healthcare sectors and between organizations, helping spread innovative and scalable solutions to meet the three aims and six priorities of the NQS.

Programs Promote Priorities

HHS encourages the public and private sectors to align work with the priorities of the NQS. Federal programs have been initiated to align with each of the priorities. Examples include:

- The Partnership for Patients, which addresses patient safety and has set goals to achieve a 40 percent reduction in hospital-acquired conditions and a 20 percent reduction in hospital readmissions compared to 2010
- The Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey, which is used to measure patient experience in order to determine a component of Medicare payment to providers

- The Multi-payer Advanced Primary Care Practice Demonstration Project, which helps medical homes become more broadly available and addresses communication and coordination of care
- The Million Hearts program, an initiative to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017
- The Community Transformation Grants program, which enables grantees to design and implement community level programs to prevent chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease
- The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, which supports the development of testing of innovative healthcare payment and delivery models (i.e., accountable care organizations and the Comprehensive Primary Care Initiative)

Measuring Quality for Better Results

A primary objective of the NQS is “to build a national consensus on how to measure quality so that stakeholders can align their efforts for maximum results.”³ This measurement process focuses and aligns activities across federal and state agencies as well as with the private sector. To support this process, NQF convened the Measure Applications Partnership (MAP) in 2011. This public-private sector partnership is comprised of organizations and experts that balance the interests of consumers, businesses, purchasers, labor, health plans, clinicians and providers, communities and states, and suppliers.⁴ Annually, through pre-rulemaking review and report, the MAP provides input to HHS on the selection of endorsed quality and performance measures for public reporting and performance-based payment programs.

Typically, the measures are selected from the NQF library of 700-plus “best in class” measures that have undergone a rigorous, consensus-based endorsement process. The MAP has identified “Families of Measures” that address chronic conditions and coordination of care across healthcare settings-effectively moving US healthcare toward the three aims of the NQS. All MAP events, processes, and products are open to the public and comments are welcomed.

HIM Plays a Direct Role in Quality Development

Providers, payers, and consumer groups are responding to the priorities of the NQS with the rapid emergence of medical homes, ACOs, bundled payment initiatives, and consumer engagement programs. HIM professionals will be called upon to ensure smooth HIM operations as well as the integrity of the data for quality measurement during these transition periods. HIM professionals will be required to ensure the integrity of data for clinical quality and performance measurement.

Work on quality is an ongoing process and the NQS is dynamic, requiring assessment and revision as necessary. AHIMA stays involved in the development of quality initiatives through public comment to federal requests for information and notices for proposed rulemaking, testimony, and other government advocacy efforts. In addition, AHIMA participates in a number of organizations and committees that are integral to quality initiatives. HIM professionals are urged to seek out opportunities to contribute expertise at the local, state, and national level.

Notes

1. Pearson, Gordon J. *Strategy in Action: Strategic Thinking, Understanding and Practice*. Financial Times Prentice Hall, 1999.
2. National Quality Forum. “NPP Partner Organizations.” http://www.qualityforum.org/Setting_Priorities/NPP/NPP_Partner_Organizations.aspx.
3. HHS. “2012 Annual Progress Report to Congress: National Strategy for Quality Improvement in Health Care.” 2012. <http://www.ahrq.gov/workingforquality/nqs/nqs2012annlrpt.pdf>.
4. National Quality Forum. “Measure Applications Partnership.” <http://www.qualityforum.org/map/>.

Resources

In addition to the National Quality Strategy, the National Quality Forum offers healthcare organizations a wide range of measures, reports, and tools to improve care. Visit www.qualityforum.org for access to those resources.

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