



NEWS RELEASE

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WSMA AND PREMERA COLLABORATE TO LAUNCH STATEWIDE PATIENT QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (QUIP)

WSMA CREDITS PREMERA’S “INNOVATIVE APPROACH”
WITH ENSURING PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

MOUNTLAKE TERRACE and SEATTLE, WA – (October 2, 2007) – Premera Blue Cross and the Washington State Medical Association (WSMA) announce their collaboration with the WSMA’s Education and Research Foundation’s (WSMERF) Quality Improvement Program (Quip) -- a physician led quality improvement program that gives physicians useful data about their patients that will improve their care.

Working through its foundation, WSMA is launching Quip as the first statewide quality program designed to further elevate the quality of care Washington patients currently receive. Quip will give physicians throughout the state access to valuable data on their patients in convenient, yet confidential, registries to help identify those in need of preventive and chronic care services. It will also give physicians free reports on their performance as compared to best practices.

“The WSMA is committed to evidence based care and the need to reduce variation in treatment to achieve optimal health outcomes for patients,” said Dr. Hugh Maloney, president of the WSMA and vice chair of the WSMERF. “The WSMERF quality improvement program will provide primary care physicians around the state with data they can use to improve patient care.”

“Premera has provided actionable information to large clinics as part of our six-year-old quality improvement program,” said Brian Ancell, Premera executive vice president for Health Care Services and Strategic Development. “Although we had begun to reach out to smaller practices within our network over the past year, Quip enables us to achieve this goal faster than we could have on our own.”

“The foundation’s QUIP dovetails nicely with Premera’s long time work on quality improvement with medical groups across the state,” said Tom Curry, WSMA CEO/Executive Director.

A longtime, successful pioneer in collaborating with physicians on quality improvement, Premera is providing its technical expertise in data collection and distribution along with data on its members in Washington state.

“It is critical that the patients’ medical information in the data gathering process remains confidential,” noted Dr. Maloney. “Premera’s innovative approach enabled us to clear all of those potential hurdles.”

In gathering, analyzing and disseminating patient data, maintaining patient confidentiality is not only a desirable ethical consideration, but it is a legal requirement of Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) that outlines confidentiality requirements for healthcare providers and insurers as well as employers.

Family physicians, internists, OB-GYNs and pediatricians statewide will be able to access confidential reports on their patients with certain conditions - diabetes, heart failure, coronary artery disease, asthma and depression - along with patients who should be screened for cervical, breast and colorectal cancer. The reports will include registries of patients’ names, the conditions for which they are being treated and when treatment is needed. The reports will also compare a physician’s practice to guidelines representing best practices.

“The project is not just another report card,” said Ancell. “The WSMERF quality improvement program will be providing physicians with information they can actually use to improve care with specific individual patients.”

A grant from the Physicians' Foundation for Health Systems Excellence (PFHSE) to the WSMA’s Foundation provided the initial funding for Quip. PFHSE is a grant-making foundation with assets of \$98 million. PFHSE devotes its resources to helping practicing physicians improve the care they deliver to their patients. The foundation provides grants to nonprofit organizations for practice-based, innovative projects that provide physician education or address quality of care or patient safety issues.

About Premera Blue Cross

Our mission is to provide peace of mind to our members about their health-care coverage. We provide health care coverage and related services to more than 1.3 million people. Premera Blue Cross has operated in Washington since 1933 and Alaska since 1952. Premera Blue Cross is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association.

Premera Blue Cross is a member of a family of companies headquartered in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, that provide health, life, vision, dental, and long-term care insurance, and other related services. In the J. D. Power and Associates 2007 National Health Insurance Plan Satisfaction StudySM, Premera Blue Cross achieved the “highest member satisfaction with commercial health plans” (regional and national companies) serving the western U.S. 2007 is the inaugural year for this study.

About the Washington State Medical Education and Research Foundation

The Washington State Medical Education and Research Foundation (WSM-ERF) is a not-for-profit 501c(3) organization formed by the Washington State Medical Association (WSMA) to help improve the health and well being of all Washingtonians. Since 1966 the foundation has conducted scientific research and projects in the public interest in the fields of medical science, medical economics, public health, sociology and related areas.

To commemorate its fortieth anniversary in 2006, WSMERF launched a groundbreaking Quality Improvement Initiative, and a renewed focus on creating public-private partnerships to support health education and injury prevention programs.

The WSMA represents over 9,000 physicians, surgeons and physicians assistants throughout Washington state.

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