



CALIFORNIA'S
VALUED TRUST
Healthcare Benefits for the Education Community

This document is part of California's Valued Trust (CVT) educational series

Be Informed. Be Involved.
Know your health care choices.

This informational series is a resource to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit our Web site at www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved.

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. For more about variations in quality of care, look for this tip sheet at CVT's Web site www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinvolved/beinformed: “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.



Look for the following tip sheet at CVT's Web site www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved.: "A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information."

The federal Agency for Health Care Research and Quality has produced summaries for patients that tell about effective health treatments for selected conditions (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 *Resources* and then click on *Patient Resources Links*.

2 Feedback from patients about the care they have received

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.

3 Qualifications of those who provide your health care

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:

- National Committee for Quality Assurance (www.ncqa.org).
- The Joint Commission (www.jointcommission.org/).

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

4 Reports with information that lets you make quality comparisons

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

- For kidney dialysis facilities: www.Medicare.gov/dialysis

Visit the website for the National Committee for Quality Assurance (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/compendium/).

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)

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**.



To help find websites that offer trustworthy health information that is based on solid medical research, look for the following tip sheets at CVT's Web site www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved:

- "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."

Use libraries (you can get help from librarians and access to computers for website searches)

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.

Source: These materials were adapted from the *Communication Toolkit: Using information to get high quality care*. The American Institutes for Research developed the Toolkit materials with funding from the California HealthCare Foundation. The National Business Group on Health maintains and host the Toolkit website.