

Using Transparency to Encourage Accountability



Puget Sound

The Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) Puget Sound Health Alliance knew that increasing generic prescribing could translate into significant savings without compromising quality.

Armed with this knowledge, the Alliance used a multi-stakeholder process to create a report on variations in generic drug prescribing among and within medical groups in the four classes of drugs measured in the 2011 Community Checkup.

**Aligning Forces
for Quality**

Improving Health & Health Care
in Communities Across America
www.forces4quality.org



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Contact

Mary McWilliams
Executive Director
mary@pugetsoundhealthalliance.org

For example, generic statins were prescribed by primary care physicians 91 percent of the time by Group Health Physicians, but only 41 percent by Bellevue Family Medicine. Moreover, individual group health providers' results clustered in a very narrow range, from 65 percent to 98 percent, while Bellevue providers spanned 26 percent to 52 percent.

“Generic prescribing is the area of performance measurement and public reporting with the greatest variation across medical groups,” said Puget Sound Executive Director Mary McWilliams. “Also, the

measures and data are reasonably straightforward, making them more credible.”

A task force assigned to the project believed the transparency of the results alone would appeal to the inherent competition between medical groups, while also putting them on notice that the information is being shared with purchasers and consumers. After gathering the results, the Alliance issued a report that makes it easy to see prescribing variations across and within medical groups.

While seemingly a slam dunk, the project was not without its challenges.

The task force initially was concerned about the currency of the data and the generic drug list, although it concluded the information was sufficiently reliable to be useful. The Alliance acknowledged the data limitations in its report and listed some factors that could enable some medical groups to perform better than others.

In another nod to better transparency, the Alliance shared a draft of the report with the medical groups and revised it based on comments it received before releasing the final report publicly.

Lessons Learned

- **Nothing is ever as simple as it seems.**
- **Be broadly inclusive in vetting the proposal; use feedback from stakeholders to shape the report.**
- **Make sure you have an expert sign off on a list of generics.**
- **Keep purchasers involved in the process so you can later make the case if needed with providers to accept this further transparency**