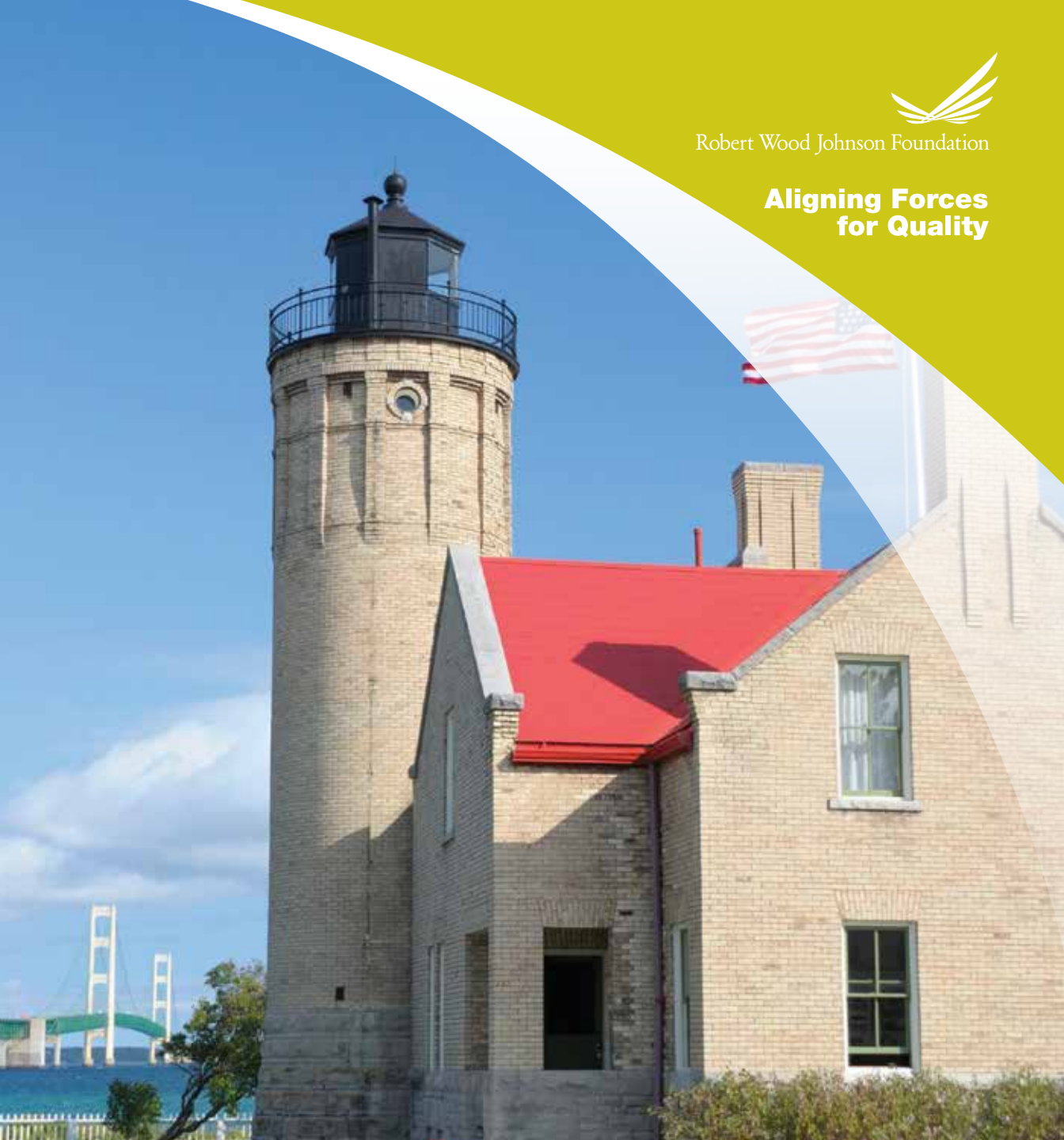




Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

**Aligning Forces
for Quality**



West Michigan

THE EMPOWERED PATIENT

The Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) initiative in West Michigan is led by the Alliance for Health (the Alliance), a 60-year-old 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership corporation operating as a regional health improvement collaborative. The Alliance represents those who receive care, give care, and pay for care, including providers, citizens, employers, community organizations, government, organized labor, academic institutions, and health plans. Its mission is encouraging optimal health for all through high-quality health care services at the lowest cost.



The Empowered Patient

What does an empowered patient look like?

They know how to come prepared for their doctor appointments, how to ask questions of their provider, and how to follow their provider's orders. They know there is a difference between quality and quantity of health services. They know there is a wealth of available resources to help them learn more about an illness, treatment, or medication.

Alliance for Health, leader of the Aligning Forces for Quality initiative in West Michigan, is training consumers to be active partners in their health care through its Consumer Empowerment Training program. More than 2,500 consumers have been completed the Consumer Empowerment Training with the goal of providing concrete guidance and tools for consumers to interact with their health care teams more effectively.

Alliance for Health is a broad-based community coalition encouraging optimal health for all through high-quality health care services at the lowest cost. Alliance for Health serves 13 West Central Michigan counties, bringing together those who give health care, those who get health care, and those who pay for health care to identify and work together on health-related community priorities.

Consumer perspectives are critical in advancing a high-quality, patient-centered, cost-effective health care system. Consumers' experiences demonstrate where the gaps are as they navigate the health care system. "People with conditions like diabetes need to

know what high-quality care is—and be able to ask for it," said Shannon Wilson, assistant vice president with Alliance for Health.

"The initiative aims to inspire patients to participate in their care."

"When we're forced to start asking 'why?' of our doctor, it's a huge watershed moment. It used to be that you always did what the doctor told you."

Alliance for Health recognizes that patients have every right to be deeply involved in their care, especially to manage costs. Consumer Empowerment Training helps teach consumers about risk factors, treatment options, and opportunities to improve health. The right care, delivered in the right setting, at the right time is something consumers should demand of the health care system. Consumer Empowerment Training teaches that more health care is not always better. And that consumers can expect high-quality care at a reasonable cost.

The United Way in West Michigan has been an advocate for the Consumer Empowerment Training. Said Deanna Demory, director of community health impact with Heart of West Michigan United Way, "When we're forced to start asking 'why?' of our doctor, it's a huge watershed moment. It used to be that you always

did what the doctor told you. Consumer empowerment is a whole new way to address health care. We're giving people power over themselves again."

The components of Consumer Empowerment Training include health literacy, quality data tools, decision aids, record keeping and record management, and staying current with developing health policy issues.

Several different trainings are offered to meet different needs. Train-the-trainer sessions educate "health advocates" to help spread best practices. Health advocates deliver up-to-date information to their peers concerning exercise opportunities and health and wellness programs. All of the social workers at Metron, a large regional chain of nursing homes and rehab centers, have been trained and will pass on their knowledge to patients and families. Parish nurses have made inroads into churches where they provide care. Senior fairs offer older adults the opportunity for patient training as well. Alliance for Health partnered with the Visiting Nurse Association this past fall to administer flu shots in conjunction with Consumer

Empowerment Training, and these sessions proved to be popular.

Priscilla Kimboko, PhD, has participated in a training session as a professor of gerontology and health administration at Grand Valley State University but also has applied the training to her personal life. "The training is valuable for people of all ages. I'm going to bring the training to my students in health-related programs," she said. Kimboko's husband has diabetes and dementia, and Kimboko herself was diagnosed with pre-diabetes last year. "The training is also personally relevant. I am able to ask for the best possible care now for my husband. We have to face our own health issues."

In the future, Alliance for Health plans to design disease-specific trainings for individuals with specific conditions, including diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and depression. These population-specific trainings should help consumers better manage their care, bring down costs for themselves and the health care system overall, and, hopefully, enjoy a better quality of life.

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