“Good quality” health care – what does this mean?

Getting good quality health care can help you stay healthy and recover faster when you are sick. But how do you know whether the care you get is good quality care?

When you get good quality health care, it means that your care is:

• **Based on the latest evidence from medical research about what types of care work best.** Each patient is different, but research has shown that some types of care tend to get better results than others. When medical evidence is available about what care works best for your condition, then using that evidence is part of good quality care.

• **Provided by skilled and knowledgeable professionals who give you personalized attention.** They treat you with respect, listen carefully, and give explanations you can understand. They take your values and preferences into account, and involve you in making decisions about your care.

• **Safe.** Most medical mistakes can be prevented. The care you get is supposed to help you and not cause harm.

• **Timely.** You can get the care you need when you need it.

You can’t take good quality care for granted

Most Americans believe that the health care they receive is the best that medicine and science can provide. Often people do get good quality care – care that works well to keep them healthy or to help them recover when they are sick or injured. But research shows that sometimes people do not get good quality care.

Research studies of patient care have shown that:

• **Some patients are receiving care that does not measure up to quality standards.** Here are just two examples of research studies that show serious problems with quality of care:
  - Over 90,000 Americans with conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease die each year because they don’t receive the type of care that research has shown to work best for their condition. For details, see The essential guide to health care quality and State of health care quality 2004 by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (www.ncqa.org).
A major study of 12 large U.S. communities done in 2004 and reported in the New England Journal of Medicine found that nearly half of the people in these communities were not getting the care that is recommended for their condition.

• **An alarming number of mistakes are made each year** – mistakes that injure patients and waste healthcare resources. For example, a 2006 report from the Institute of Medicine says that medication errors are among the most common medical errors. These errors harm at least 1.5 million people every year. According to the report, it costs more than $3.5 billion each year to treat hospital patients who are injured by medication errors. For more about this, visit the Institute of Medicine at www.iom.edu for the report called *Preventing Medication Errors*.

**Healthcare providers are working to improve quality of care**

Doctors, hospitals, health plans, and other healthcare organizations in the United States are working hard to improve the quality of care they give to patients and help prevent mistakes.

• A booklet called *Quality Rules! How far have we come?* is a 2008 progress report about healthcare improvement by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, an independent non-profit organization (www.ihi.org). This report has examples of quality improvements being made by healthcare organizations throughout the country.

• One of the best ways to improve patient safety is to set up systems and procedures that prevent human errors. For example, when medicine containers have bar codes, pharmacists and hospital staff can scan the bar code to be sure they are giving the right dose of the right medicine to the right patient. For more examples of what is being done to help prevent medical errors, visit www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/.

**What is Blue Shield of California doing?**

To help you determine if you are getting good quality care, we have created several quality tools.

**Performance Profile**

The Performance Profile shows you how well medical groups and physicians perform in important areas of getting the right medical care, patient satisfaction and health care affordability. In selecting the measures, Blue Shield used the following guidelines:

• Quality measures based on national standards and supported by national quality organizations such as the National Quality Forum, the Joint Commission and the National Committee for Quality Assurance

• Scores provided by trusted third-party sources that are independent of Blue Shield, such as the Integrated Healthcare Association, CMS, and the Pacific Business Group on Health

• In areas where standards do not exist, additional measures produced by Blue Shield, selected for display based on impact to member health, finances and decision making

You can access the Performance Profile by searching for your provider through the *Find a Provider* link at blueshieldca.com/calpers.

**Hospital Comparison Tool**

The Hospital Comparison Tool is an interactive way to help you decide which hospital or facility offers the best combination of price and performance based on patient satisfaction.

You can access the Hospital Comparison Tool by logging in to blueshieldca.com/calpers and clicking on *Health Programs* on the right, then the *Tools* link on the left.
What can you do to help make sure you are getting good quality care?

Once you understand that the quality of health care can vary, it’s clear that you can’t take good quality care for granted. To help make sure that you and your family get good quality care, you need to be actively involved in finding and using information about healthcare quality.

“I’m happy with our family doctor and haven’t had problems, so I was surprised and concerned to find out how much quality of care can differ from one doctor or hospital to the next.

I want the best for my family, so now I’m getting more involved in health care decisions that affect us.”

Finding and using information about quality of care can help you stay healthy and make good decisions about treatment when you get sick. Below are resources that tell more about how you can make sure that you and your family are getting good quality care.

**Quality comparison resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient Satisfaction Information</td>
<td>Review report cards of HMOs and Medical Groups.</td>
<td>[<a href="http://opa.ca.gov/report_card/">http://opa.ca.gov/report_card/</a>]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating Hospital Quality in California</td>
<td>Find comparison ratings for hospitals in your area as rated by CalHospitalCompare.org.</td>
<td>[<a href="http://www.calhospitalcompare.org">http://www.calhospitalcompare.org</a>]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Group Quality Rankings</td>
<td>Review report cards of physician groups for treating their HMO patients.</td>
<td>[<a href="http://opa.ca.gov/report_card/">http://opa.ca.gov/report_card/</a>]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TalkingQuality’s Report Card Compendium</td>
<td>Searchable database of comparative information on the quality of hospitals, medical groups, individual physicians, nursing homes, and other providers of health care.</td>
<td>[<a href="http://www.talkingquality.gov/compendium/">www.talkingquality.gov/compendium/</a>]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learn more This flier is part of a series of information resources to help you get quality health care, including “How You Can Use Information on Quality of Health Care,” “To Get Better Health Care, Get Informed And Involved,” and “Know Which Types of Health Care Work Best” For more resources, visit blueshieldca.com/CalPERStips.