



RESEARCH SUMMARY

Reporting Summary Scores for CAHPS® and Other Measures of Quality

The Aim

One of the challenges facing the developers of consumer reports on health care quality is the complexity of the information, particularly when consumers have to consider multiple pieces of information to make a decision. Summary scores, which combine the scores for multiple measures of health care quality, are regarded as a promising solution to that challenge. However, summary scores may have drawbacks as well as benefits, and the impact of summary scores on consumer decisionmaking is not well understood. The CAHPS team is conducting research to better understand how consumers interpret and use summary scores and how these types of scores are currently being used in the field.

Anticipated Benefits

The audiences for quality reports include consumers and health care providers. Consumers may appreciate the simplicity of a single quality score, especially when weighing quality along with cost, location, and other considerations. Many health care providers, on the other hand, seek the details that enable them to identify weaknesses in the quality of the care they deliver and may feel that summary scores obscure certain aspects of their performance. Because their audiences' needs are diverse, report developers make trade-offs every time they have to decide which health care quality measures to include and how to present the scores for those measures. By delving into the pros and cons of summary measures, the CAHPS team's research will help to better inform those decisions.

Our Approach

The CAHPS team is conducting two research projects:

- A test of consumers' reactions to different levels of information for quality measures.
- An investigation of current uses of summary scores in consumer reports and the perspectives of both report developers and key stakeholders in the reporting process.

To test consumers' reactions, the CAHPS team is using an innovative, fictitious Web site—named SelectMD—that permits experimenting with the ways that different types of quality data affect consumer understanding and choice among doctors. The Web site was designed to replicate basic content, presentation, functionality, and navigation features commonly found in contemporary Web-based reports on health care quality.

Research participants are asked to use scores for patient experience of care (CAHPS survey results), use of effective treatments (HEDIS), and methods to reduce medical errors to select a primary care doctor. They can sort doctors by level of performance on the quality measures, filter doctors based on gender or years of experience, and view narrative reviews from patients of the fictitious doctors. A tracking system records every



Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Advancing Excellence in Health Care • www.ahrq.gov



click made by participants and the time spent on each page. After choosing a doctor, participants complete a survey about their experience using the Web site. For this experiment, participants are randomly assigned to one of three kinds of data displays: summary scores and detailed quality scores, summary scores only, and detailed scores only. The CAHPS team will analyze differences in participants' choices, their perceptions of the information, and their actual use of the information on the site.

At the same time, the CAHPS team is documenting the use of summary scores in reports for consumers and exploring the motivations and perspectives of both report developers and major stakeholders. This research effort involves two rounds of semi-structured interviews with eight developers of national and statewide reports as well as three multi-stakeholder national organizations dedicated to improving health care. These interviews will help us to understand current practices, objectives, and concerns with regard to the reporting of summary scores.



Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Advancing Excellence in Health Care • www.ahrq.gov