

Patients Have 50/50 Chance of Receiving the Right Care

In a major study reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers found patients receive appropriate care only 54% of the time. The study states, "There is little systematic information about the extent to which standard processes involved in health care - a key element of quality - are delivered in the United States." Further, appropriate medical care varied widely across the United States.

Such deficiencies "pose serious threats to the health of the American public" that lead to tens of thousands of preventable deaths each year, researchers report in today's *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Study results

- 54.9% - The proportion of recommended preventive care provided
- 53.5% - The proportion of recommended acute care provided
- 56.1% - The proportion of recommended care provided for chronic conditions
- Range of 52.2% to 58.5% - Adherence to the medical processes involved in follow-up care
- 65% of patients with high blood pressure received recommended care
- Only 45% of heart attack patients received beta-blockers, which have been proven to reduce the risk of dying by 23%.
- Only 33% of patients had been screened for colorectal cancer; routine screening and follow-up care could prevent about 9,600 deaths a year.

Conclusions

The deficits we have identified in adherence to recommended processes for basic care pose serious threats to the health of the American public. Strategies to reduce these deficits in care are warranted.

Reactions

AAHP President and CEO Karen Ignagni said, "The care consumers receive continues to fall far short of what the latest and best medical science recommends. We couldn't agree more that consumers in America's health care system face a dangerous disconnect between what the best medical science recommends, and the treatment they often receive."

Recommendations

Carolyn Clancy, director of the Agency for Health Quality and Research, says Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson is eager to switch to a more efficient paperless health care system.

Johns Hopkins' Earl Steinberg says, "It's ludicrous to expect physicians to keep up with hundreds of practice guidelines without a computerized system. Physicians and patients should also receive computer-driven reminders."

The RAND researchers who conducted the study recommend that automated clinical decision-making tools be made broadly available to providers, an approach long used and championed by America's health plans.

Source: New England Journal of Medicine, USA Today, 6/26/03.