

Monday, April 11, 2011

## Health Group Gives Top Grade to Hudson Headwaters

A national organization dedicated to improving the quality of primary care has given Hudson Headwaters Health Network its highest rating. The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) has recognized Hudson Headwaters as a Level 3 Patient Centered Medical Home.

“Achieving NCQA’s highest rating is the fruit of years of effort to transform how we provide health care,” said John Ruge, M.D. and CEO of Hudson Headwaters. “It means that our patients receive affordable, high-quality care focused on their needs and coordinated for their benefit.”

Ruge said that Hudson Headwaters’ quality improvements reflect its role in the Adirondack Medical Home Pilot, an innovative initiative that offers a patient-centered and preventive approach to the delivery of care. “In the past two years, we have adopted e-prescribing, switched from paper to electronic medical records, and given our patients access to their medical information on their own computers.

“We have increased outreach to people with chronic diseases to help manage their conditions. Our Transition Care program helps people just released from the hospital to understand their medications and ensure that they receive appropriate follow-up care. We also focus on prevention, contacting patients who can benefit from screenings such as PAP tests, mammograms and colonoscopies.”

Ruge said that the costs associated with additional services and outreach will be offset by the financial savings from fewer emergency room visits and hospital admissions. “Patients who understand how to self manage their chronic diseases have the tools to stay healthier, as do people who understand the risks of poor diet and unhealthy lifestyles. Healthier people can often avoid higher-cost medical care settings, which is why the medical home model has emerged as an important strategy for improving quality and holding down costs.”

Ruge cited the work of the New York State Medicaid Redesign Team, charged by New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo to find \$2.6 billion in savings this year from the Medicaid Program, which provides health care for those living in poverty. “The redesign team made 70 recommendations, including 69 spending cuts and one increase. The only spending increase is for patient-centered medical homes. Policy makers understand that serving Medicaid patients with the medical home model will reduce costs. It’s a classic example of smart government – tighten the best where it makes sense, but also bet on winning strategies that will reduce costs throughout the system.”

### Recognition Based on Evidence

Hudson Headwaters achieved the Level 3 recognition from NCQA based upon a range of evidence-based standards for improving quality and reducing costs. NCQA’s Medical Home Recognition Program defines a patient-centered medical home as a model of care that strengthens the relationship between the

patient and their primary care physician, while reflecting a commitment to access, affordability and accountability. The standards emphasize dedication to continuous quality improvement.

“Our patients can expect even more changes in the days and months ahead, because improving quality is an ongoing process,” said Cyndi Nassivera-Cordes, Vice President for Medical Support and Hudson Headwaters’ lead administrator for the Adirondack Medical Home Pilot. “We’re looking at ways to increase access and we are considering programs to further reach out to patients.”

Nassivera-Cordes noted that Hudson Headwaters’ application to the NCQA was sponsored by the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), the agency that provides oversight to Federally Qualified Health Centers like Hudson Headwaters. “Hudson Headwaters is one of the first community health centers to receive HRSA’s support in seeking Level 3 NCQA recognition,” she said. “It reflects the agency’s confidence in our ability to provide high-quality care to everyone in the communities we serve.”

Each year, Hudson Headwaters provides care to 60,000 people, accounting for 250,000 patient visits at its 13 health centers that serve a 3,700 square mile area of Essex, Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties.

The NCQA is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving health care quality. Its seal of approval is a widely recognized symbol of quality, based on an organization’s ability to pass a rigorous, comprehensive review of its performance.

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