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What does “quality healthcare” mean to you?

If you ask the various stakeholders in the health-care system (i.e., doctors, patients, medical organizations, insurers, the government), you most likely will get very different answers. However, if we all answered this question as patients – and everyone is a patient at some point – we will have very similar answers.

Most patients see quality healthcare as a long-term relationship with a physician whom they can trust and who will help them effectively navigate through the health-care system to ensure that they have the best possible outcomes.

In today’s complex healthcare system, the focus on quality has often been overshadowed by issues associated with cost. Contrary to what some may think, however, we can have both – high quality care at a lower cost.

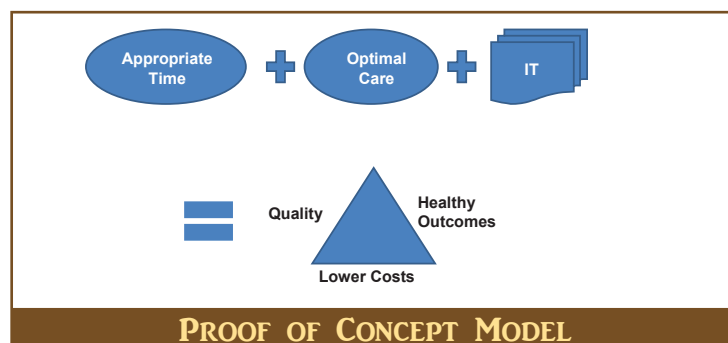
A Model of Change

Life Laboratory, a non-profit organization focused on improving healthcare quality, is dedicated to improving the current model through its proof-of-concept approach.

At Life Laboratory: Patients Partner for Quality Healthcare

Using selected family medical practices as “living laboratories,” the physicians and patients collaborating at Life Laboratory are focused on demonstrating the best ways for primary care physicians and their patients to achieve quality, safety, access, and lower-cost healthcare.

has found that by providing high-quality healthcare, we can lower the number of patients visiting emergency rooms, minimize hospital re-admissions, lower the total costs of prescribed medications, and lower the number of prescriptions per patient.



The Life Laboratory model supports the idea that by providing a combination of sufficient patient-physician time, optimal care, and efficient technology, there will be improved quality of care, healthy outcomes for patients, and reduced costs. (See the “Making High-Quality Healthcare a Reality for All” article on page 11 of the August/September 2011 issue for more details).

Research accumulated for over 10 years by Life Laboratory confirms that high-quality patient care and lower costs can coexist. Life Laboratory

Putting the Patient First

An excellent example of an approach that is a model for change and follows similar principles to those of Life Laboratory is the Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH). This concept is being adopted by physician practices across the country and is based on providing comprehensive primary care for individuals in an environment that fosters partnerships between patients and their physicians.

With the PCMH approach, patients have ongoing



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relationships with a personal physician who is focused on addressing all of their healthcare needs. Whether a patient needs acute, chronic, preventive, or end-of-life care, Life Laboratory and the PCMH model positions the primary care practice as the patient’s advocate throughout their entire care cycle.

Both the Life Laboratory and the PCMH approach emphasize the need for the utilization of certified information technology systems to make sure patient data is updated and accessible. Leveraging technology not only ensures optimal patient care that minimizes redundant testing, but can also help measure performance, educate patients, and enhance communications.

Quality for All

Progress toward quality care is being made. Concepts such as PCMH and organizations such as Life Laboratory are making headway to ensure that access to safe individualized care is available to all, and that it is given in a timely and efficient manner resulting in optimal healthy outcomes.

In a model of care where patients are not rushed through their appointments, physicians have enough time to really know their patients.

For more information or to become a friend of Life Laboratory, please visit LifeLaboratory.org or call 215-646-6504.

THE PATIENT JOURNEY

Let’s use a diabetic patient as an example. In the PCMH model, the primary care practice would be responsible for managing all aspects of the patient’s care, with a “best practice and prevention approach.” The beneficiaries of this journey for a patient with diabetes are the patient and his or her family. Best practices and healthier outcomes can be accomplished within the partnership of the patient and the PCMH practice. Prevention of complications by controlling blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol will be what sustains this journey on the path of vitality and not the path of impairments and disability.

The PCMH primary care practice would also be responsible for the comprehensive care inclusive of patient and family education about diabetes, nutritional counseling, specialty care, preventive care, and most importantly a coordinated and well-managed plan of care.

This is the attainable and quality patient journey that has inspired the mission of Life Laboratory.