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Independent Writer



Portfolio Sample

Client: Six Degrees HealthCare Consulting
Project: Op-Ed for Continuing Campaign:
“Attention Must be Paid”: Safeguarding
Patient-Centered Care

Six Degrees leads an effort by physician and patient organizations nationwide to effectively target methods of healthcare reform. This Op-Ed piece was a general editorial sent to participating members of physician organizations. Later customized for a specific physician, it was submitted to several southeast papers, including the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Headline: Quality Healthcare: Not “One Size Fits All”

Quality of service is a subjective thing. When buying groceries from the corner store, it might mean that products are fresh, stocked, and reasonably priced. When building a home, it can mean lots of things, least of which include finishing on time.

But what about quality of healthcare? It gets even more muddled and subjective, and it’s probably the field where quality matters most.

It’s also an increasingly hot topic. Physicians, media and patients can all agree that the current state of healthcare is troubling. Initiatives and advances are underway to improve the medical system, including:

- Electronic medical records, available quickly and easily for check-ups and emergencies
- Electronic prescriptions, delivered directly to pharmacies, which cut down on dispensing errors
- Treatment guidelines, developed by insurance and government agencies, indicating recommended tests and treatments (at a lower price) for specific symptoms and conditions
- Pay for performance, a system whereby physicians are rewarded for excellence in care

These developments, in both technology and physician practice, could mean significant improvements in the world of healthcare. But alone, or developed without taking time to consider what quality healthcare actually is, these advances may not be sufficient.

What does it mean to receive quality healthcare? It could be relatively simple. A patient gets sick, she goes to her doctor, and undergoes a thorough examination. After careful deliberation, the physician recommends treatment. The patient follows instructions and her health improves.

However, as most know, it’s rarely so simple.

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Headline: Quality Healthcare: Not “One Size Fits All” (Page 2)

What about the man who receives recommended treatment and experiences not a lessening of symptoms, but a rash of side effects? His physician might have to give an unfair choice: continue to receive ineffective and painful medication that is inexpensive, or take a different medication that is much more costly. For some, this represents an impossible choice between health and financial well-being.

Quality in this case is not a product, but respect for and support of individual needs. Our system now often ignores those needs. In an effort to make medicine more efficient and cost-effective, the system is moving towards an approach of uniformity, of “one size fits all.” Any future improvements must institute an expectation of fairness, treating patients as people rather than statistics.

The method to give patients quality healthcare must involve a partnership between physician, patient, and other groups like insurers. The most promising method is something called evidence-based medicine.

Simply stated, evidence-based medicine is a technique where physicians take into account treatment guidelines, recent evidence in the form of studies and reports, and each patient’s specific needs to make treatment decisions. This system is one that values the physician for their vast expertise, the insurance groups for their ability to provide inexpensive care, and the patients. It is flexible, and it is a significant improvement to the world of healthcare.

Changes pushed through without careful thought, and without input by practicing physicians, will not fix the ailing medical system. Instead, it can introduce new problems, and continue pushing a “one size fits all” approach that is impractical and dangerous to patients.

Practicing physicians who see patients every day, such as myself and my colleagues, will continue to work to make our voices heard by policymakers. We must guarantee that patients never have to wonder about their quality of care. We must ensure that new advances and developments do what they are supposed to: provide quality healthcare that is thorough, reasonable and individual.