MICHIGAN HEALTH CARE GROUP DEVELOPS STANDARD GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTING AND TREATING PERSISTENT ASTHMA

Group Believes Its Actions Will Lead to Better Service and Better Outcomes for Patients

(EDITOR'S NOTE: May is recognized nationally as asthma awareness month.)

DETROIT, May 29, 2001 – Health plans that cover more than six million Michigan residents, as well as major physician groups in the state, today announced they are supporting standard guidelines for treating persistent asthma.

The Michigan Quality Improvement Consortium (MQIC—pronounced “M-quick”), which announced standard guidelines for diabetes last fall, has moved to tackle asthma and hopes to help the state’s asthmatic population by developing common, evidence-based guidelines. The consortium's work is believed to be the largest effort in the country to simultaneously develop standard guidelines or protocols and to agree upon a common way to measure how many patients receive the guideline treatments.

MQIC includes physicians from southeast Michigan health plans, the Michigan Association of Health Plans, Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan Osteopathic Association, Michigan Peer Review Organization and Michigan State Medical Society.

The participating health plans are Blue Care Network, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Care Choices, Health Alliance Plan, HealthPlus of Michigan, M-CARE, Midwest Health Plan and The Wellness Plan.

The guidelines were mailed this month to more than 12,000 Michigan primary care physicians, allergists and pulmonologists.

The consortium was started in 1999, encouraged by the UAW-auto Community Health Care Initiatives program, which urges the medical community to work together to enhance the quality of care by applying evidence-based medical care consistently.

“Health plans already have guidelines for the treatment of certain diseases,” says Thomas Simmer, M.D., an MQIC participant and corporate medical director for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, “however they’re not always consistent and the approach has been uncoordinated. There's also been no standard way to measure how many patients received guideline treatments.”

-more-
Dr. Simmer said that by developing and implementing common clinical practice guidelines and performance measures, health plans throughout the state can provide better service to their members and also better health outcomes for patients.

The guidelines say that patients with persistent asthma benefit greatly from identifying and avoiding specific things that trigger attacks -- like smoking. They recommend use of inhaled anti-inflammatory medications and peak flow meters, receiving flu shots, and participation in patient self-management plans, which educate the patient and family about how to best manage the condition. The guidelines address the fact that patients with persistent asthma often receive treatment only for their acute attacks and could benefit from medicine that controls inflammation between attacks.

Consortium officials say that clinicians should modify their treatment recommendations based on individualized goals of therapy. They recommend that doctors give self-management plans to their patients with persistent asthma, which can help the patient to better monitor and control the condition.

MQIC establishes a common performance measurement strategy and coordinates the mailing of support material from the participating health plans. This simplifies administration for physicians, who previously had to use multiple and sometimes overlapping guidelines from health plans and other groups.

“We support development of guidelines that help ensure all individuals with asthma receive key services to improve the quality of their care and help them manage their disease,” said Jack Billi, M.D. Billi is associate dean of clinical affairs and associate vice president of medical affairs at the University of Michigan and chairperson of the Michigan State Medical Society's Advisory Committee on Medical Economics.

MQIC has three working groups—a medical steering committee to agree upon a common set of evidence-based clinical recommendations, a performance measurement group to develop common performance-measurements and reporting processes and an implementation group to oversee the distribution of guidelines and information.

The consortium plans to use the information it gathers to seek funding for research grants so it can study outcomes of its efforts and publish its results.

The complete guidelines are available in printed form. Over the next few weeks, the guidelines will be posted on Web sites of several MQIC organizations.

(Comments from area health care leaders and additional media contacts are attached. The complete guidelines are available upon request.)
Here's what leaders in the health care community are saying about the efforts of MQIC:

"The development of a collaborative process by physicians to apply evidence-based medical care consistently across the board in a community is a significant step in improving the quality of care, the quality of life and cost effective use of our health care resources."
--Bob Alpert, executive director of the UAW Center for Community Health Care Initiatives

“Care Choices is enthusiastically supportive and involved in the work that the Michigan Quality Improvement Consortium does. The collaboration represents an important movement toward fundamental redesign of the health care system necessary to realize the opportunity of good managed care.”
--Michael J. Baker, M.D., chief medical officer, Care Choices

“MQIC is a prime example of the positive changes in health care quality improvement that can occur when physicians, health plans, and community leaders work together. HAP’s involvement in the implementation and measurement of the MQIC guidelines supports our overall disease management program for asthmatic patients.”
--Mary Beth Bolton, M.D., senior vice president and chief medical officer for Health Alliance Plan

“M-CARE has long been active in helping people with asthma manage their disease to improve their quality of life. With that in mind, we are pleased to support this very important MQIC initiative to develop common guidelines that will enable health plans and physicians to implement a uniform and consistent approach to treating asthma. People with asthma will now have a clear understanding, along with their doctors and health plans, of what measures can be taken to help them lead healthier and better lives.”
--Robert E. Church, D.O., vice president and medical director, M-CARE

“This is an example of how physicians, working with other groups, can develop a community-based approach to improve the quality of care for asthmatic patients throughout the community.”
--J. Denise Clement, M.D., M.S., director, Health Care Quality Assurance, Ford Motor Co.

“I think it’s wonderful that the health plans, physician organizations and the state are working together to improve the consistent delivery of quality medical services through the development of evidence-based guidelines. It should be a win-win result, not only for health plans and physicians, but especially for the citizens of Michigan.”
--Eugene Farnum, executive director, Michigan Association of Health Plans

"This increased, cooperative focus on education and treatment will truly make a difference in the lives of asthma patients. We have seen the success of public-private partnerships such as this in other areas of health care, and fully support this best-practice initiative."
--James K. Haveman Jr., director of the Michigan Department of Community Health.

"The medical directors of the Michigan Association of Health Plans have been working on guidelines that can be adopted by all health plans and organizations. We fully support the MQIC efforts and will encourage physicians to achieve the goals of these guidelines.”
--Marshall G. Katz, M.D., chairperson for the Medical Directors Committee of the Michigan Association of Health Plans and medical director of Midwest Health Plan.

The Wellness plan is proud to be part of the MQIC effort to improve the health of residents of this state. A common guideline is important to ensure asthmatic patients are receiving appropriate and timely care. TWP endorses the guidelines and believe they will improve the care of asthmatic patients.
--Marc Keshishian, M.D., vice president and chief medical officer, The Wellness Plan

-more-
"Improving patient care is a goal we all share. MQIC proves that physicians, big business and health plans can work together to promote medically sound guidelines for the best patient care."

-Kenneth H. Musson, M.D., Traverse City ophthalmologist and president of the 14,500-member Michigan State Medical Society

"The Michigan Osteopathic Association (MOA) is proud to be a founding member of the Michigan Quality Improvement Consortium. We believe MQIC's objectives of providing standardized, medically documented guidelines to physicians will achieve the mutually beneficial goals of improved quality by increasing compliance with guidelines, and cost containment by reducing the bureaucratic hassle in the physician's office. This approach is consistent with the philosophy of the osteopathic physician that the patient is the focal point for health care, not an insurance provider."

--Dennis M. Paradis, executive director, Michigan Osteopathic Association

"A broad initiative like this has enormous potential not only to enhance the lives of asthmatic patients but also to improve patient safety and reduce costs."

--Nancy Rae, senior vice president, Human Resources, DaimlerChrysler Corp.

“We believe that by collectively establishing and implementing best practices guidelines for asthma care across the community, we can favorably impact the quality of health care that asthma patients receive. This translates into better long term quality outcomes.”

--Joan Rodney, regional director, SE Michigan, Health Care Initiatives, General Motors Corporation

"Blue Care Network is very pleased to join in this important collaborative effort that is directed toward achieving measurable gains in the fight against asthma. We fully support the objectives of the MQIC and believe it will have a major positive health impact on all asthmatic patients in Michigan."

--Douglas R. Woll, M.D., F.A.C.P, senior vice president and chief medical officer for Blue Care Network

“HealthPlus of Michigan is pleased to work with our physician partners in adopting common collaborative guidelines for the treatment of patients with asthma. We believe consistent diagnosis and treatment will result in improved quality of life for these patients.”

--John Saalwaechter, M.D., M.B.A., vice president and chief medical officer, HealthPlus of Michigan