



## PROFESSIONAL ISSUES


# New partnership targets health care quality

## Sluggish quality improvement and booming costs have pushed major health care players to coordinate their efforts.

By [Kevin B. O'Reilly](#), AMNews staff. Posted Dec. 29.

Despite intense focus on improving care and keeping patients safe from harm, American health care quality is only about 2% better this decade than last, according to the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. That is just not good enough, say leaders of a major new initiative aimed at coordinating quality improvement and patient safety efforts among physicians, hospitals, accreditation and certification bodies, health plans, payers and patients.

The initiative is known as the National Priorities Partnership ([www.nationalprioritiespartnership.org](http://www.nationalprioritiespartnership.org)). It was launched in November by the National Quality Forum, a voluntary standards-setting body that convened 28 national organizations to work together to cut unnecessary care and improve quality and patient safety.

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"We have made some terrific improvements in particular areas," said Janet M. Corrigan, PhD, NQF's CEO. "But when we look at the country as a whole we see a slow rate of improvement."

Corrigan said the problem is that quality-improvement efforts have been too scattered.

"We may be, frankly, trying to measure and improve in too many areas," she said. "It may be better to narrow down to important areas that will produce large gains."

The ambitious initiative will target specific improvements in care coordination, patient and family engagement, population health, patient safety, palliative care and overutilization. Representatives from the participating organizations will meet again in Washington, D.C., in February 2009 to "align activities to meet these goals," Corrigan said.

Among participating organizations is the American Medical Association-convened Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement ([www.physicianconsortium.org](http://www.physicianconsortium.org)). It will develop measures in areas the partnership has identified.

"The American Medical Association is committed to improving the quality of health care for patients, and we are pleased to support the vision of the National Priorities Partnership," President Nancy H. Nielsen, MD, PhD, said in a statement. "Working together, we can make real progress toward our goal of health system reform, so that patients have access to the quality care they need."

Margaret E. O'Kane, president of the health plan-accrediting National Committee for Quality Assurance, is co-chairing the initiative. She said that while all the players acknowledge the scope of the problem and agree on goals, things will get tougher when it comes to applying the goals to such delicate areas as overutilization.

"My 'waste' is your income," O'Kane said. "And the evidence on what is appropriate isn't as strong as we would like it to be. ... We're just going to work it. That's the way progress is made. Often, progress means that somebody's not happy about it."

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