

# **The Basics of Pharmacy Performance Measurement**

Donna West-Strum, RPh, PhD  
The University of Mississippi

## **Background**

Over the years, there have been many efforts to measure and improve health care quality through performance measures. Performance or quality measures, which are used to quantify the quality of a specific aspect of care, may be created based on evidence-based guidelines. Measures should be scientifically reliable, valid, interpretable and actionable, relevant and feasible. They are developed to enable a standard way for the specific aspect of care to be measured across practice settings; thereby allowing quality of care to be compared across providers as well as over time. For example, a performance measure was developed to assess if patients received beta-blocker therapy in the hospital after having a heart attack. As hospitals started using this measure, it was possible to develop a hospital-specific report card, showing which hospitals provided better care after a heart attack. In response, hospitals began to implement processes to ensure that patients who had a heart attack were given beta-blockers. People pay attention to what is measured; and hence, quality of care can be improved if it is measured and acted upon.

## **Focus of Article**

This summary provides an overview of pharmacy performance measurement. Pharmacy quality is related to appropriateness of medication use and medication safety, including medication errors and adverse drug events. With the increased utilization and cost of medications, more attention to quality in pharmacy is warranted. Therefore, there is more attention to pharmacy performance measurement as a way to assess pharmacy quality. Health plans, insurers, employers, and other payers have great interest in pharmacy quality. These organizations are interested in measuring pharmacy quality for three important reasons: 1) to provide pharmacy quality reports to consumers to help them choose the highest quality of care, 2) to provide quality reports to prescription drug plans and pharmacies to encourage quality improvement, and 3) to develop pay-for-performance programs whereby health plans and providers with better quality scores will receive higher fees.

## **Application**

Pharmacy performance measures being developed are related to appropriateness of drug use, safety of medication use, medication adherence, medication cost, and patient satisfaction with drug therapy. Examples of pharmacy performance measures include excessive dosing of oral diabetes medications, use of high-risk medications in the elderly, and adherence to chronic medications. Pharmacy performance measures allow payers and others to evaluate pharmacies and prescription drug plans on their performance of a specific, evidence-based aspect of care. As previously suggested, these measures may then stimulate quality improvement programs in prescription drug plans and pharmacies, be provided to consumers to help them select a prescription drug plan or pharmacy, or be used to develop pay-for-performance programs.

## **What's In It For You?**

Pharmacists need to be aware of the pharmacy performance measures that are being developed and adopted, such as by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for the Medicare Part D program. Pharmacists are encouraged to use the measures in their practice sites to drive quality improvement initiatives in the pharmacy. For example, pharmacists may decide to evaluate medication adherence of statins in their pharmacy. If the pharmacist finds that statin users do not continue to get refills, the pharmacist may want to develop some systematic interventions to improve medication adherence in the pharmacy.

These performance measures provide an opportunity for the pharmacist to demonstrate the quality of the pharmacy services provided. Performance measure scores are related to the

pharmacist's ability to improve medication use and not just dispense medications; thereby allowing the pharmacist to demonstrate the effectiveness of their pharmacy services. A pharmacy with higher ratings on performance measures may attract more patients or may be able to receive higher reimbursement rates through a pay-for-performance system.

### **PQA and its role in pharmacy performance measurement**

PQA is the Pharmacy Quality Alliance, formed in 2006. Its mission is to improve the quality of medication management and use across health settings with the goal of improving patients' health through a collaborative process to develop and implement performance measures and recognize examples of exceptional pharmacy quality. PQA is actively involved in developing pharmacy performance measurements. They have workgroups developing measures related to medication adherence, pain, overuse of medication, and MTM. Pharmacists should visit the PQA website ([www.pqaalliance.org](http://www.pqaalliance.org)) to learn more about the pharmacy performance measures being developed. As measures are considered and developed, there is opportunity for pharmacists and the public to comment on the measures. PQA collaborates with various stakeholders to understand where performance measures are needed as well as how they can and will be used in the health care system. For example, CMS has adopted some of the PQA measures to use in their 5-Star rating system related to measuring performance of Medicare Part D prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage plans. These performance measures are then publicly reported by CMS as well as used in their value-based purchasing initiatives.

#### References:

Pharmacy Quality Alliance website <http://www.pqaalliance.org>

Warholak TL and Nau DP (editors) Quality and Safety in Pharmacy Practice. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY. 2010.