



A participant in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Aligning Forces for Quality* initiative to improve health and health care in Wisconsin.

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CONSORTIUM RELEASES EVALUATION ON ASK ME 3™ PILOT PROGRAM

Program Engages Patients in their Healthcare

MADISON –A consortium of organizations working to improve the quality of healthcare in Wisconsin released a report today on the Ask Me 3™ pilot program. The pilot tested the effectiveness of an education program designed to improve patient-provider communication, help patients understand health instructions and engage patients in their own health care.

“Research indicates that the ability to read, understand and use health information is the strongest predictor of an individual’s health status—more than age, income, education level, race or ethnicity, or employment status,” said consortium member Karen Timberlake, Secretary of the Department of Health Services. “This pilot program tested an approach aimed at helping patients and clinicians improve their communication skills by encouraging patients to ask questions.”

“Good communication between doctors and patients is critical to improving health care,” said Christopher Queram, president and CEO of the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ), one of the members of the consortium.

As part of the program, known as Ask Me 3™, patients are encouraged to ask their health care providers three simple, but essential questions at every visit and providers are encouraged to assist their patients in understanding the answers to these three questions:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Studies show that people who understand health instructions make fewer mistakes when they take their medicine or prepare for a medical procedure. They may also get well sooner or be able to better manage a chronic health condition.

The pilot program compared two different implementation approaches among racially and ethnically diverse, low-income patient populations in six community health centers in Beloit, Marshfield, Milwaukee, Racine, and Wausau. Orientation sessions for staff at each center were held prior to launching the program. Ask Me 3™ program materials such as brochures and fact sheets were placed in easily accessible places throughout the community health centers. A four-minute DVD played in the main waiting areas emphasizing the importance of patients asking their care provider questions and demonstrating how individuals might use the questions in their visit.

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“These centers, who serve many minority and low-income individuals, were excellent partners,” said Timberlake. “The evaluation found that patients and providers thought that Ask Me 3™ was a good tool, but by itself was not enough to get patients to ask their health care provider questions. Findings also suggest that having someone speak directly to the patients about the importance of understanding what their doctor is telling them is helpful.”

“The second part of the process is getting clinicians to encourage their patients to ask questions to try to make sure that they understand their health condition and needed treatment,” said Queram. “But clinic schedules are tight and providers have limited time to spend with patients—to listen to them, to draw them into a discussion.”

WCHQ and DHS conducted the pilot program with the support of the Wisconsin Medical Society, Wisconsin Literacy, Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association, South Central Area Health Education Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison—Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison—Department of Family Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison—Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, and the Wisconsin Research and Education Network.

The pilot project was supported by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and *Aligning Forces for Quality*, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

To view a copy of the Ask Me 3™ pilot report, visit
<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aboutdhs/OPIB/policyresearch/AskMe3Report.pdf>

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