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CONSUMER REPORTS TEAMS WITH MASSACHUSETTS GROUP TO RATE NEARLY 500 PRIMARY CARE DOCTORS' PRACTICES

CR and Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP) Jointly Release Evaluations of Doctors' Practices

YONKERS, NY and WATERTOWN, MA — For the first time in its history, Consumer Reports is unveiling Patient Experience Ratings of primary care physician groups. The Ratings cover nearly 500 practices in Massachusetts and were compiled in collaboration with Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP), a coalition of consumers, government agencies, hospitals, insurers, physicians and researchers.

The ratings of 329 adult practices and 158 pediatric practices are drawn from MHQP's statewide patient experience surveys, which have been conducted and publicly reported on by MHQP since 2006. Consumer Reports intends to partner with other organizations to provide physician Ratings in other states as well.

The findings from MHQP's survey provide important information from the patient's perspective about how well physicians communicate with their patients, coordinate medical care, know their patients, and whether patients would be willing to recommend their doctor to family and friends. The survey covered 47,565 adults and 16,530 parents of children, all of whom had commercial health insurance. The survey also asks patients about their experiences with the rest of the office staff, such as nurses, receptionists, and the people who handle billing and insurance questions. Parents received a different set of questions since children have different health issues.

"Massachusetts Health Quality Partners is on the cutting edge of providing reliable, meaningful and fair information about primary care physicians to consumers," said John Santa, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center. "We are hopeful that Massachusetts residents will use these independent findings to help them select physician practices that are the best match for their priorities and needs."

Consumer Reports is producing a special version of the magazine for distribution to its subscribers and newsstands in Massachusetts. It will have a different cover, highlighting the story "How Does Your Doctor Compare?" and feature a special, 24-page insert with the Ratings of physicians' practices.

The physician Ratings report is also exclusively available online at www.mhqp.org.

"Our overarching goal is to equip both patients and physicians with information they can use to improve the quality and outcomes of care," said Barbra Rabson, executive director of MHQP. "We are delighted with the important progress that medical practices are making in every part of the state. And,

even better, from a patient perspective, is the news that doctors continue to use the results from our surveys to improve patient care.”

MHQP's patient experience reports offer opportunities for patients and physicians to work together to build strong partnerships and support patients to become more involved in their care decisions. Patients can use MHQP reports, now featured in Consumer Reports, to see how their own care priorities line up with their primary care practices and to better understand what to expect and ask for at the doctor's office in order to improve their own care and their relationship with their doctor. “Research spanning several decades and our own surveys show evidence of a meaningful link between better care experiences and improvements in health outcomes, more appropriate use of health care services, adherence to medical advice and treatment plans, and lower malpractice risk,” said Rabson.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the special doctor Ratings report through *Aligning Forces for Quality*, the Foundation's signature effort to improve the quality of care in 16 targeted communities across America. “This partnership is an important advance in our ongoing effort to prepare and disseminate easy-to-understand information on the quality of care,” said Anne F. Weiss, M.P.P., Quality/Equality team director and senior program officer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “Patients can use this information to make informed choices about their own care and become better partners with their doctors. Doctors and their care teams can use the reports to compare their performance to others and identify areas for improvement.”

Consumer Reports' Dr. Santa noted that, regardless of where an individual may live in the Bay State, he or she is close to high-scoring practices. (Practices must have at least three physicians to be rated.) And while high- and low-scoring practices were found in all parts of the state, none of the seven regions scored better or worse overall than any other region. He also noted that while Massachusetts' 2006 health-reform law has increased demand for doctors, the Ratings suggest that the law hasn't made it harder for people who already have a primary-care provider to get the care they need.

Most practices received one of the top two Ratings in the MHQP survey. Still, the findings suggest that most practices have some room for improvement. Here's a look at some of the other statewide survey findings:

- **Sixty-three percent of survey respondents said their doctor was always informed and up-to-date about the care they received from specialists.** Consumer Reports recommends that patients make sure doctors know about the care they get from other providers, including other physicians as well as acupuncturists, chiropractors, herbalists, and other alternative health-care practitioners, and make sure they coordinate with your doctor as well. That can help to improve the quality of care and avoid duplicative care.
- **Seventy-two percent said someone always followed up with them to provide results on blood tests, X-rays, or other tests.** If patients don't get test results in a timely manner, or when their doctor promised them, they should call. And they should request a written copy for their files. Some practices use a secure online portal that provides access to test results and other information.
- **Fifty-seven percent said the front-office staff was always as helpful as they should be.** Patients should have patience, but let the staff know if they expect them to be more helpful. Patients who ask for more help are likely to get it. If they don't get the help they need, they should follow up with the office manager.

“These findings can be helpful to patients and to practices that are working to improve. If your practice doesn't perform well on one of the measures, or if you see a problem, it's best to have a conversation with the practice to see what they're doing to improve,” said Rosalind Joffe, a patient from Newton who also co-chairs MHQP's Patient and Public Engagement Council.

The report also indicates that patients sometimes experience challenges when it comes to scheduling and seeing their doctor in a timely way. Some highlights:

- ✓ Thirty-eight percent said they didn't always get an appointment for care they needed right away and the same percent said they didn't always get after hours advice they needed right away.
- ✓ Sixty percent of patients said they didn't always get taken to the exam room within 15 minutes.
- ✓ Forty eight percent said they weren't always seen by their provider within 15 minutes after being taken to the exam room.

Overall, parents were more willing to recommend their children's doctors to others than adults were willing to recommend their physicians. And practices that treat children scored slightly higher on most measures than the adult practices.

About Consumer Reports

Consumer Reports is the world's largest independent product-testing organization. Using its more than 50 labs, auto test center, and survey research center, the nonprofit rates thousands of products and services annually. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has over 8 million subscribers to its magazine, website and other publications. Its advocacy division, Consumers Union, works for health reform, product safety, financial reform, and other consumer issues in Washington, D.C., the states, and in the marketplace.

About Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP)

Massachusetts Health Quality Partners is an independent, nonprofit organization established in 1995 by a group of Massachusetts health care leaders who identified the importance of using valid, comparable quality measures as a way to drive improvement. Its membership reflects a broad-based coalition of stakeholders working together to promote improvement in the quality of health care services in Massachusetts.

MHQP manages the Greater Boston Aligning Forces for Quality Initiative, part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's signature effort to help lift the overall quality of health care across the country. Greater Boston joins 15 other communities, in which health care performance measurement and public reporting help physicians and hospitals identify areas for improvement, guide consumers' decisions in choosing high-quality providers, and offer purchasers objective information on the quality of care being delivered.

A Note About This Report

This report is drawn from Massachusetts statewide data collected by Massachusetts Health Quality Partners, a participant in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Aligning Forces for Quality Initiative*. *Aligning Forces* is the Foundation's initiative aiming to lift the overall quality of health care in targeted communities throughout the country, reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and provide models for national reform. One core requirement of the program is for participating communities to publicly report the type of data used here.