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## Medical-home consulting emerges as growth industry NCQA offers certification program

By Andis Robeznieks

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In the 1990s, consultants advised medical practices on implementing the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. Then they helped make sure doctors weren't ruined by Y2K, and—years later—they advised clients on becoming meaningful users of health information technology.

Today, experts stand ready to advise physicians on transforming their practices into **patient-centered medical homes**: A practice model that emphasizes care coordination, increased access and enhanced doctor-patient communication, all with an emphasis on continuous quality improvement.

To identify the experts who are legitimate, the National Committee for Quality Assurance now offers PCMH Content Expert Certification.

The NCQA, which has recognized 5,200 practices as medical homes, said the program offers medical home “advocates and coaches a way to stand out from their peers by demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the NCQA PCMH model.” The new program also gives practices “a way to gauge the qualifications of the growing numbers of consultants,” **according to a news release**.

“Professionals who earn PCMH Content Expert Certification will distinguish themselves as authorities on the most transformative delivery system improvement of the last five years,” **Margaret O’Kane**, NCQA president, said in the release.

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Requirements include **attending two NCQA** medical home seminars and passing a computer-based test at a “secure testing station.”

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Dr. Bruce Bagley, medical director for quality improvement for the American Academy of Family Physicians, said medical home experts are “popping up all over the place.”

“Some of them know what they are doing, and some of them don’t,” he said.

Bagley is also on the leadership team of TransformMED, a medical home practice transformation consulting service and wholly owned subsidiary of the AAFP. Since forming in 2005, TransformMED has assisted 677 practices with almost 12,500 providers and clinicians, so Bagley doesn't see the need for getting certified by NCQA, but he sees how it can be useful—especially in establishing objective knowledge standards.

“Having NCQA say we know what we’re doing is not necessary,” Bagley said. “However, an independent consultant might find it helpful.”

Bagley said TransformMED and the NCQA's medical home recognition program “have grown up together,” but the AAFP and TransformMED do not favor any one medical home recognition or certification program over another—though “clearly, NCQA is the market leader.”

Another group with a medical home program is the Skokie, Ill.-based Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, which recently completed a pilot for a **new certification program involving onsite surveyors**. Four programs involved in the pilot were certified as medical homes: Metro Community Provider Network, Englewood, Colo.; Desert AIDS, Palm Springs, Calif.; Heritage Medical Group, Lemoyne, Pa.; and Pioneer Health Center, a school-based health clinic in Detroit.

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"Right now, transformation in primary care is big business," Bagley said. "People realize we have to do things differently, and a lot of people need help with that."

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