

Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc.

January 5, 2011



Op-Ed Submission

Nurses, physicians and other health care professionals work determinedly to provide safe and excellent care. In Wisconsin we want to do even more; our patients deserve nothing less. That is why we support Governor Walker's proposed "Health Care Quality Improvement Act" -- legislation that will help Wisconsin health care providers deliver quality care second to none.

Health care practitioners have a long history of critically analyzing their own and their peers' performance to improve care. Historically, groups of providers reviewed and discussed patient cases, using what they learned to improve future care. Our laws, crafted in the 1970s, encouraged this collaboration by protecting "peer reviews" from use in lawsuits. Lawmakers understood that if peer reviews could be used against a physician, nurse or other practitioner, it would discourage candid participation in quality improvement activities.

Today, robust quality improvement is more important than ever, but our laws have NOT CHANGED. Over the last several years, the risk to providers who work to improve care by cooperating with regulators or participating in their facilities' quality improvement efforts has increased. As a result, some are reluctant to share what they have learned.

While national report cards show that Wisconsin is a national leader in delivering high quality care, our peer review laws have fallen behind other states, no longer aligning with the way modern care is delivered. Wisconsin is fortunate to have integrated health systems, hospitals and clinics anxious to work internally and with each other to research and improve practices. Through collaboration, they can make measurable strides to improve patient safety and outcomes. We can strengthen and accelerate this work by protecting those collaborative efforts. We also can encourage the good work of our regulatory agencies by protecting people who cooperate with the regulators. And we can enable more public reporting of quality and safety data.

Our patients deserve the best care possible, the primary goal of Governor Walker's Health Care Quality Improvement Act. This forward looking and progressive initiative deserves strong support from health care providers and consumers and, most importantly, bipartisan support in the Legislature.

Nick Turkal, MD
Chair, Wisconsin Hospital Association
President/CEO, Aurora Health Care

Steve Brenton
President, Wisconsin Hospital Association