

Report suggests ways to improve health-care provider 'report cards'

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As health care reform expands the use of "report cards" to grade health care providers, greater attention to reporting methods may be needed to assure the quality of such efforts, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

"Public reports about the quality, efficiency and patient-centeredness of [health care](#) providers can do much to improve the nation's [health care system](#)," said Dr. Mark W. Friedberg, the study's lead author and researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "But if the performance reports are poorly constructed, they could needlessly disrupt existing clinical relationships and drive patients to inferior providers."

Writing in the March edition of the journal *Health Affairs*, Friedberg and colleague Cheryl L. Damberg outline a checklist to improve the methods behind health care performance reporting. The RAND Health checklist is intended to minimize the frequency and severity of misclassifying provider performance, and to avoid adverse and unintended consequences of reporting.

"Methods used to compare health care providers should be robust and transparent so that we can improve confidence in the accuracy of the reports," said Damberg, a RAND senior policy researcher. "Both health care providers and patients can benefit from such improvements."

Public reports about the performance of [health care providers](#) on quality,

cost, [patient satisfaction](#) and outcomes have become increasingly common. Since 2004, Medicare's Hospital Compare website has posted public reports about the performance of most U.S. hospitals on a wide variety of measures. The [Affordable Care](#) Act of 2010 requires that another website be established by 2013 to report physician performance.

RAND researchers outline methods that can help government agencies and other groups create accurate and useful health care performance reports. The work builds on the pioneering efforts of RAND Health and other researchers in the area of [health care quality](#).

Researchers say that when health care report cards are given to the public, there should be a mechanism in place to see whether the tools help achieve their intended goals, such as helping patients choose better-quality providers.

"We hope this work opens a wider discussion about how to improve the creation and dissemination of health care performance reports," Friedberg said. "While there are challenges to doing this work, we think report makers can overcome them if they have the right resources and expertise."

Provided by RAND Corporation

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