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Systematic Review of Current Disparities Research Interventions Identifies Successful Strategies for Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care

Findings published in this month's issue of Medical Care Research and Review; Complete body of reviewed research is available through a new interactive tool on the Finding Answers Web site

Chicago—Today, a team of researchers from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Finding Answers: Disparities Research for Change* initiative will hold a Webcast briefing on how health care organizations, providers and payers can reduce racial and ethnic health disparities in their own organizations. They will also launch a publicly available, interactive, online tool that allows users to search for interventions. The database can be found at www.SolvingDisparities.org/fair_database. The recommendations and database are based on findings from a review of more than 200 interventions in the areas of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, breast cancer, cultural leverage and pay-for-performance incentives. Articles outlining the findings and recommendations appear as a special supplement in the October 2007 edition of *Medical Care Research and Review*.

Health disparities in minority populations exist regardless of socioeconomic status. During the briefing, several promising intervention strategies will be identified to help bridge the gap. Recommendations to health care leaders include developing interventions with multiple components, culturally tailoring quality improvement approaches, and allowing nurses to take the lead in patient-centered programs.

While the existence of racial and ethnic disparities in health care is well documented, there is a shortage of practical and effective solutions. The Finding Answers initiative emphasizes not only the discovery of innovative interventions to reduce racial and ethnic gaps in health care, but also the pragmatic details necessary to encourage and support other health care organizations to tailor and implement successful interventions in their settings.

"Providers that are taking the initiative to address disparities in their organizations are setting the pace for what's to come," says Dr. Marshall Chin, director of the Finding Answers program and associate professor at the University of Chicago. "There is a clear need for solutions that can ensure equal access and quality health care."

This review also found that there is often a shortage of information about how strategies focused on overall quality improvement affect minority patients. Without this information, the unintended consequences could make current disparities even worse. Interviews conducted with leaders of major incentive programs indicated that although they were aware that their programs may affect disparities, few are structuring their programs in a manner likely to ensure that the effect is beneficial.

"An important discovery of the systematic review is the lack of information about how to implement interventions targeting minority populations," says Debra Pérez, a senior program officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "This review provides a glimpse into what has been proven to reduce disparities, but sadly it also unveils much more about the challenges in getting us there."

To learn more about the systematic review and what health care organizations can do to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities or to view the Webcast of today's briefing, visit www.SolvingDisparities.org.

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Finding Answers: Disparities Research for Change is a national program funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and based at the University of Chicago. The program is the cornerstone of the Foundation's strategy to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health care by 2008. To learn more about Finding Answers and other initiatives dedicated to eliminating disparities in health care, visit www.SolvingDisparities.org.

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