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## Doctors team up for patient quality care initiative

By Tammie Smith

Local doctors hope to improve patient care in the Richmond area by opening up their medical decisions and practices to the scrutiny of other doctors.

The doctors are part of an HCA Virginia-backed initiative called Virginia Quality Care Partners.

"It's doctors getting together, deciding what are the important things to measure and do to improve quality, and holding ourselves accountable for meeting those standards," said Dr. Glenn Giessel, a lung specialist, of Pulmonary Associates of Richmond and chairman of the newly formed organization.

"We think that will be something that appeals to both patients and the people who pay the bills, the insurers, often the large self-insured companies," he said.

The collaboration started with about 30 doctors and is open to the entire Richmond-area medical community, Giessel said.

Doctors working independently have professional guidelines for how to take care of patients, and some private practices may review doctor performance in-house. Some insurers also may issue doctor "report cards" that measure performance.

"Every doctor we hope will do his best all the time," Giessel said. "This is a way of saying there are certain things that clearly are known to improve outcomes. We should do this on a regular basis. There should be very few outliers or deviations from that.

"We just now opened up enrollment for doctors, so we'll have to see how many join," he said. "I would anticipate 200 or 300 to start with."

There is no cost to the doctors to participate.

"What the doctors are providing is sweat equity, if you will. They are putting in time to develop the measures and review performance," Giessel said.

Hospitals have been on the performance-improvement bandwagon for a while, a task made easier with electronic medical records.

"We have tons and tons of examples of best practice care plans and order sets that our patients are put in when they arrive," said Dr. Colin Banas, chief medical information officer at VCU Medical Center. Individual doctors also get report cards, with results part of annual evaluations.

"We just kicked off, within the last six months, something that we call RAM care. RAM care stands for reliable, accurate and measurable care," Banas said. "The idea was to really focus in on some key areas. ... We have a really robust performance-improvement committee."

Virginia Quality Care Partners has 37 medical specialties represented, and each specialty has specific initiatives the doctors will track.

For instance, for family practice doctors, the reviews will measure 14 items, such as how often a doctor's patients get recommended preventive care such as flu shots, pneumonia vaccine and colon cancer screenings.

For pulmonary specialists, the reviews will measure how often patients with chronic asthma are prescribed long-term medication to keep the illness under control and if patients are evaluated at least annually.

HCA Virginia support includes startup money, staffing and technology. The group is not trying to build an exclusive network, said Dr. Richard M. Hamrick III, HCA Virginia chief medical officer.

"We believe that physicians are crucial to leading health care transformation," Hamrick said.

"It's really just an organization to start the discussion about how we improve quality and start to think about the cost of health care. ... The focus is not on who you are employed by but how we can work together," Hamrick said.