

Medical Leadership Council Meeting: November 2006

Physician Leaders Adopt New Policy Principles; Unveil Statewide Resource Database and New Language Access Projects

The Medical Leadership Council on Cultural Proficiency met November 15, 2006 in Sacramento to map the future of its work to improve language access and cultural competence in health care. “The 36 member organizations of this council are among the state’s leaders in bringing culturally appropriate health care to the millions of patients whose lives depend on it,” said Robert K. Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment, which convenes the council twice a year. “Together, we are changing the way health care is delivered in California.”

Policy Principles

The leaders of medical specialty societies, medical associations, health systems, hospitals and advocacy organizations agreed on a new set of Policy Principles for Improving Cultural Proficiency and Care to Minority and Medically Underserved Communities. With the goal of expanding consensus among the statewide organizations and their national counterparts, each group will seek official organizational endorsement on a range of recommendations in areas including language access, cultural competence, provider education, workforce recruitment and training, and payment for interpreter services. The principles are posted at www.medicalleadership.org.

New Resource Database

The California Academy of Family Physicians unveiled a new, searchable, statewide database, funded by The California Endowment, listing interpreters, patient education information in languages other than English, local nonprofit organizations offering services in languages other than English, and other resources available now to physicians, medical office staff, patients and the public at www.medicalleadership.org. Click on Interpreter Resources on the home page.

Council Member Projects

Council member organizations presented information about new projects under way, including:

- The Network of Ethnic Physicians Organizations' work to improve quality and access to care provided to safety net communities and to advocate for solo and small group ethnic physicians serving these populations;
- A National Center for Quality Assurance project to understand and address barriers to care for minority patients in small primary care practices;
- A California Medical Association project to learn more about challenges facing physicians' offices in providing culturally appropriate care; new set of Policy Principles for Improving Cultural Proficiency and Care to Minority and Medically Underserved Communities, with the goal of widening consensus among statewide and national medical specialty societies, medical associations, hospitals, health systems and others on key issues including components of provider education, health care workforce diversity, and payment for interpreter services
- A project by the Institute for Medical Quality, a subsidiary of the California Medical Association, to provide technical assistance to continuing medical education providers to meet the new state requirement that all CME courses address cultural and linguistic competence in the practice of medicine.
- A California Academy of Family Physicians project to help physicians' offices better identify and meet patients' language access needs. (See Tools at www.MedicalLeadership.org.)

Updates and findings will be presented at future Medical Leadership Council meetings.

Policy Update

Several recent state Senate and Assembly bills are designed to further language access and cultural competence. Assembly Bill 2283 requires the Medical Board to annually compile data on physician ethnicity and foreign language proficiency by zip code and post the information on the Board's Web site by October 1 each year.

Senate Bill 1405 requires the Department of Health Services to create a Task Force on Reimbursement for Language Services to find ways to leverage federal matching funds from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to pay for language assistance services and to assess model practices in other states.

A final round of public hearings is pending on the implementation of SB 853, which requires health plans and insurers to provide translation and interpretation for medical services.

The Medical Board has begun work to implement the Cultural and Linguistic Competency of Physicians Act 2003, which charges the Board with overseeing county

medical societies in developing educational classes on foreign languages and cultural practices and beliefs that impact health care.

Endowment Update

With the goal of developing culturally competent health systems, the California Endowment continues its leadership by “advancing the knowledge, attitudes, skills and experience of health providers and health systems to effectively serve California’s diverse communities,” explained Ignatius Bau, JD, Program Director. Specifically, The Endowment is organizing its work into four areas: (1) advocating for policy changes; (2) educating and training health professionals; (3) advancing quality improvements by health systems, plans and providers; and (4) engaging patients/consumers.

From partnering with advocacy groups like the Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum and the California Primary Care Association, to encouraging medical and allied health schools to teach cultural competence and increase the numbers of minority students and faculty, The Endowment is working on several fronts to improve care. At the health systems level, the foundation is supporting the National Committee on Quality Assurance (NCQA) awards to health plans for their improvements in cultural competence and is funding research by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) on effective practices at scores of hospitals. The Endowment also is supporting community groups that provide effective services to Latino, African American, Asian American and other underserved patients/consumers, and continues to convene the Medical Leadership Council.

“The Council organizations are doing exciting work,” said Leonard Fromer, MD, FAAFP, Past President of the California Academy of Family Physicians, the lead administrative organization for the Council. “We all want to provide the best care possible to all the people of California in all our wonderful diversity. Through research, education, policy and cultural awareness we can make it happen.”