The Scholarship of Quality

David B. Nash, MD, MBA
Editor

Enter a hospital today, and you will see physicians entering orders into computers, nurses scanning patient barcodes, and custodians keeping floors clean and dry. Each of these tasks is an example of the increased emphasis on quality improvement (QI) that pervades today's healthcare system.

A major catalyst for this activity was the 2000 publication of the IOM report, "To Err is Human,"[1] which exposed flaws in the U.S. healthcare system and galvanized an international effort to improve quality. At the heart of QI initiatives is the "the scholarship of quality," a field dedicated to defining, expanding, and distributing the knowledge base of quality.

The scholarship of quality is divided into roughly three dimensions: 1) journals, textbooks, and research reports that contain the growing knowledge base; 2) academic departments, professional organizations and think-tanks, focused on creating knowledge; and 3) professional schools, fellowships, and educational seminars that transfer knowledge and train the next generation of leaders. Collectively, these resources create the framework on which stakeholders design and implement interventions.

Peer-reviewed journals play a key role within the scholarship of quality, by providing a vehicle to disseminate information and serve as a forum for discussion. Clinically focused publications with wide-based circulations, such as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *Annals of Internal Medicine*, appeal to practicing physicians. Journals targeted at health quality research include: *The Milbank Quarterly*, *Health Services Research*, *Inquiry*, *Frontiers of Health Services Management*, and *Quality Management in Health Care*. Professionals engaged in the practice and daily implementation of QI, eg, practice management, employer-based initiatives, and patient safety, might subscribe to: *Health Affairs*, *Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Safety*, *American Journal of Medical Quality*, *Journal of Ambulatory Care Management*, and *Journal of Patient Safety*. Journals with an international quality scope include *Clinician in Management*, *Quality and Safety in Healthcare*, *The Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*, and *International Journal for Quality in Healthcare*.

Examples of several textbooks that synthesize the growing knowledge base are: *The Healthcare Quality Book: Vision, Strategy, and Tools*,[2] designed to provide a robust

foundation of knowledge for all stakeholders involved in QI; *The Quality Solution: A Stakeholder's Guide to Improving Health Care*,[3] featured in courses on healthcare quality taught at professional schools of public health, medicine, law, and management; and *The Core Curriculum for Medical Quality Management*,[4] published by the American College of Medical Quality (ACMQ) and which serves as the basis for its educational programs.

Professional organizations, through fostering the development and exchange of knowledge, are another foundation of the scholarship of quality. For example, The American College of Medical Quality (ACMQ) was founded to "provide leadership and education in healthcare quality management."[5] While practicing physicians account for the majority of ACMQ's membership, approximately 15% of its members are nurses, lawyers, educators and healthcare administrators. ACMQ publishes a bimonthly peer-reviewed journal, the American Journal of Medical Quality; and a bimonthly newsletter, Focus, which offers case studies, policies, legal discussions and original articles on health quality topics. Through educational seminars and audio forums, members can become eligible for designation as Fellow of the American College of Medical Quality or earn a Certification in Medical Quality.

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), headquartered in Cambridge, MA, was founded by Donald Berwick in 1991 to "help lead the improvement of health care throughout the world." IHI offers myriad programs, resources, and products, as well as a fellowship program in collaboration with the Summer Program in Clinical Effectiveness at the Harvard School of Public Health.

At the international level, the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQUA), founded in 1985, has a membership representing over 70 countries. It publishes a bulletin; a peer-reviewed journal – the *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*; and it organizes an annual conference. The British Association of Medical Managers (BAMM) sponsors several key initiatives aimed at training physician leaders, eg, the Faculty of Medical Management and Leadership, in collaboration with the Royal College of Physicians, (in development). BAMM publishes a quarterly peer-reviewed journal, *Clinician in Management*.

Training programs for the next generation of leaders are an essential part of the scholarship of quality. A majority of medical schools today, including Jefferson Medical College, offer dual-degree pathways, where students can earn an MPH or MBA along with their medical degree. According to the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) Annual Medical School Survey, during the 2004-2005 academic year, 64 of the 125 (51%) LCME-accredited medical schools in the US offered MD/MPH programs, while 42 (34%) offered MD/MBA programs. A decade earlier (1994-1995), only 35 schools

(28%) offered MD/MPH programs, and 13 (10%) offered MD/MBA programs.[6] Some medical schools have developed "areas of concentration" that allow students to seek enrichment in areas outside of the core medical school curriculum.

To address health care quality in graduate medical education, The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) holds residency programs accountable for six core competencies for physicians in training, which have previously been described in this space.[7] Among these is knowledge of "systems-based practice," which includes advocating for quality patient care and optimal patient care systems.[8]

Among the national fellowship programs that provide training in health care quality are the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program, The Physician Post-Residency Fellowship Program at Stanford University, and the Harvard Pediatric Health Services Research Fellowship program.

The scholarship of quality serves as an engine for innovation within healthcare. To improve healthcare quality, one must combine evidence-based medicine with evidence-based management.[9] The scholarship of quality feeds into this framework by developing the evidence-based management core; it lays the foundation for interventions that will ultimately bridge the quality chasm.

As always, we are interested in your thoughts.

Kartik Patel, MD
Post Graduate Year II Internal Medicine
Jefferson Medical College
kartikp@gmail.com

David Nash, MD, MBA
David.Nash@jefferson.edu

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