

Quality leadership earns two state assns. AHA's inaugural Davidson milestone award

BY LUCY AMENT

Innovations in transparency and staff preparedness helped the Iowa Hospital Association (IHA) and Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA) earn the AHA's first Dick Davidson Quality Milestone Award for Allied Association Leadership, presented July 17 at the 2011 AHA and Health Forum Leadership Summit in San Diego.

Named for AHA President Emeritus Dick Davidson, who led the organization from 1991 to 2006, the new award honors state, regional or metropolitan associations that help hospitals improve quality of care. Davidson strongly promoted the role of hospital associations in leading quality improvement during his tenure at AHA and as president of the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) from 1969 to 1991, during which time MHA was recognized nationally for its work on the development of indicators that allowed Maryland hospitals to measure and compare quality of care for the first time.

The two award winners have pursued similar objectives in their efforts to help member hospitals improve quality. Both have prioritized transparency around health care-associated infections and created a public dialogue about the importance of avoiding them. And both have helped achieve high statewide levels of influenza immunizations among hospital staff.

IHA started its critical push toward quality five years ago, when it joined with the Iowa Medical Association to create the Iowa Healthcare Collaborative (IHC). Conceived to improve health care quality, patient safety and value in the state through diverse stakeholder buy-in, IHC is powered by a board that includes members of the business and physician communities as well as consumer and third-party payer representatives.

The collaborative works closely with hospitals, physicians and

patients to better focus their programs and develop the tools and educational resources they need. It assists hospitals with the adoption of state and national programs to improve processes, share best practices, refine data collection, use toolkits and receive educational materials. This has included the adoption of "bundles of care" – established protocols or practices for patient safety – that lead to better outcomes and a reduction in infections.

Through the collaborative, IHA has helped Iowa hospitals achieve enviable quality outcomes. All Iowa hospitals participate in the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's (IHI) 100,000 and 5 Million Lives campaigns, and 97% voluntarily and publicly report data on four surgical site infections, central line infections, two MRSA measures, and the immunization of health care workers. The latter is particularly impressive: the statewide employee vaccination rate rose from 68% in 2006 to 91% in 2009-2010.

In Washington, quality improvement efforts took off in 2005, when WSHA created the Patient Safety Program. The program, which benefits from the membership of all community hospitals in the state, provides a forum for hospitals to share best practices and embrace collaboration in patient safety and quality. Through the program, WSHA sets annual evidence-based goals for patient care improvement.

WSHA has helped hospitals leverage one another's experience by establishing the Safe Table Learning Collaboratives. The collaboratives encourage sharing of best practices through monthly in-person or online meetings and use of the Quality Benchmarking System, created by WSHA to allow for secure web-based quality measurement application. Efforts to reduce central line and ventilator infections since 2005 have resulted in 318 lives saved and a cost savings of \$53 million.

All Washington hospitals have



Dick Davidson Quality Milestone Award. Named after AHA President Emeritus Dick Davidson, the new AHA award honors state, regional or metropolitan associations that help hospitals improve the quality of care. The award was presented to the Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA) and the Iowa Hospital Association (IHA). From left are: AHA President and CEO Rich Umbdenstock; WSHA President and CEO Scott Bond; IHA President and CEO Kirk Norris; and Andy Davidson, president and CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems and son of the former AHA president, who led the association from 1991 to 2006.

adopted the World Health Organization's standardized surgical list, participate in the IHI's two campaigns, and are transparent on surgical site infections. Meanwhile, 70% of Washington health care staff were immunized against the flu in 2009-2010 (versus 45% in a typical season).

Carol Wagner, WSHA's vice president of patient safety, gives credit to hospitals throughout the state for spearheading quality improvement and instinctively looking to one another for opportunities to collaborate.

"It was the hospitals that began this process," Wagner notes. "They said, we need to do this, and we can do it better by doing it together. They began by looking at the most important challenges in care and setting goals – not just for good care but for the best care – and setting a timeline to achieve those goals."

Wagner credits state legislation that has since 2004 enabled the state's hospitals "to have a measure of confidentiality in discussions about improving quality and measuring. We could share data without fear of litigation."

The association, she notes, "has

one of the most comprehensive public reporting websites, particularly around infections acquired in hospitals."

Wagner also gave a nod to the leadership of the man who inspired the award. "Dick Davidson and his leadership challenged us to look at how we were providing care and set the foundation for understating that care has to change, that it's not an option," she says.

IHA President and CEO Kirk Norris says working together comes naturally in his part of the country. "We have a very collaborative environment that's part of the history of Iowa and the upper Midwest – a largely agronomical environment where people rely on each other and have a higher expectation for collaboration and cooperation," he says. "We knew that our benchmarks compared very favorably to those in other areas of country. The medical and hospital communities are good at what we do, and we wanted to be a leader in the policy shift regarding quality. It was very intentional on our part."

The IHC initiative "lines up very well with the new health care reform law," Norris says. "We're

on the forefront of advocacy to change the methodology related to value-based payment. Although the accountable care organization (ACO) model looks like it may need tweaking, people are very interested in what we're doing in Iowa because we have a high level of folks here with medical homes."

AHA board member Jonathan Perlin, M.D., who chaired the awards selection committee, said WSHA and IHA have demonstrated not just specific techniques for quality improvement, but smart use of science, data-driven communication and effective engagement of varied stakeholders to improve performance. Perlin is HCA's president of clinical services and chief medical officer in Nashville.

He says both associations "are well positioned to help hospitals across the country be as successful as possible in the era of value-based purchasing and transparency. They demonstrate that higher performance makes for better business, because complications are expensive, and these programs achieve better outcomes for less money."

Lucy Ament is a freelance writer based in Grosse Pointe, MI.