

The Committee on Governance Corner

Making Headway on Health Disparities

Pinpointing why disparities in health care are occurring and eliminating them should be a priority in every health care setting – physicians' offices, hospitals, specialty clinics and all the rest. The task is not easy. It takes time, information, resources, leadership from the top, partnering with others in the community and a sustained commitment. But the results measured in quality, patient safety, community trust and health are worth the effort.

That is why the AHA has joined together with four other national health care organizations – the Association of American Medical Colleges, American College of Healthcare Executives, Catholic Health Association of the United States, and National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems – to form *Equity of Care*, an initiative to eliminate disparities in health and health care that seeks to put the latest thinking on disparities elimination in one easy to access place.

The group recently released its first case study guide examining successful practices hospitals and health systems have put into place. The guide looks at nine hospitals and health systems and summarizes each organization's key successes toward achieving one of the group's three goals: increasing the collection of race, ethnicity, and language preference data to facilitate its increased use; increasing cultural competency training for clinicians and support staff; and increasing diversity in governance and management. The case examples offer a snapshot of some best practices and lessons learned for other hospitals and systems working to make improvements.

The group also revamped its website, www.equityofcare.org, to make it easier for visitors to find the latest resources. The website also now includes commentaries by leading voices in the field. Initial contributors include AHA President and CEO Rich Umbdenstock and Catholic Health Initiatives President and CEO Kevin Lofton.

In addition, the AHA's Health Research & Educational Trust recently updated its Disparities Toolkit. This free tool provides information and resources to help hospitals, health systems, clinics and health plans implement a systematic framework for collecting data on patients' race, ethnicity, primary language, sex and disability for quality improvement efforts, especially those related to equity of care

Visit www.hretdisparities.org for more information.

Kimberly McNally is COG chair and a trustee of Harborview Medical Center/UW Medicine in Seattle, WA. She can be reached at kamcnally@att.net