Helping Members Adapt, Explore Best Practices and Promote Better Care

BY BENJAMIN K. CHU, M.D., AND JOHN G. O’BRIEN

In 2009, the Committee on Research of the American Hospital Association convened for the first time. The group comprised hospital leaders and experts in health care. Part of their many duties included developing the AHA research agenda for 2010–2012. This was no small task because health care was undergoing tremendous change, and the AHA was challenged to respond to ensure it provided the field with the tools and resources they needed to provide high-quality care to patients and communities.

In response, the COR proposed four research questions to the AHA. These questions were based on what were believed to be the most prominent issues before the field, areas in which we didn’t have all the answers, but knew they would be critical to hospitals. The questions included:

• How can hospitals and health systems integrate care and improve performance?
• What characteristics lead to a high-performing system of care?
• What are the most promising practices and system design elements for reducing health disparities?
• What is the role of the hospital in a new community environment?

Over the past three years, the AHA has responded vigorously with a series of reports, guides and toolkits. It also has maintained a cadre of experts who continually advise the COR and our members on best practices and lessons learned. Although these questions are not “solved,” the AHA has prepared the field better for the challenges ahead. Overall, the compilation of work from across the association is used widely by the field and offers relevant information to hospital leaders.

The research has added to the knowledge base in several areas and provided insight into the cost-effectiveness of different integration mechanisms. It has explored the implications of health information technology. It has highlighted strategies to coordinate efforts better with providers and community organizations to reduce disparities. Finally, the COR has helped to clarify the delivery and operational structures needed to implement different types of bundled payments successfully across settings and providers of care.

The COR recently has embarked on the next triennial AHA Research Agenda for 2013–2015, which you can read here: http://ow.ly/gaA1W. The questions we will concentrate on are:

• What are the most effective and efficient ways for hospitals to integrate care and perform better across the continuum of care?
• What are best practices for hospitals and health systems to adopt to sustain financial performance during the shift from volume-based to value-based business models?
• How can payment redesign be structured to encourage efficient use of health services; and what are effective implementation strategies to reduce unwarranted variation in utilization of services to optimize quality and efficiency in the health care system?

The pace of health care transformation will only accelerate. The AHA, through the COR and other venues, aims to help our members adapt through research, advocacy and exploration of best practices, to promote the very best care.

Benjamin K. Chu, M.D. (left), regional president of Southern California Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, is the 2013 AHA chairman and co-chairman of the Committee on Research.

John G. O’Brien, is president and CEO of UMass Memorial Health Care Inc. and co-chairman of the Committee on Research.
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