

DM accreditation helps plans focus even more on quality care

JCAHO, NCQA and URAC say their DM certification programs lend an added merit badge in the pursuit of value

BY MARI EDLIN



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THIS JUST MIGHT BE the year that disease management comes of age. All three of the healthcare industry's accreditation bodies have developed DM accreditation programs, enhancing their dedication to quality care. While many DM service organizations have quickly sought the new accreditation or certification, only a handful of health plans have jumped on board.

"Our program reflects the competence of DM [initiatives] that show a strong commitment to continuous quality improvement, resulting in return on investment," says Maureen Potter, executive director of Disease-Specific Care (DSC) Certification for the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. "Certification is an assurance that the organizations have with-

stood the scrutiny of an external reviewer." She says certification also will help companies decrease the risk of the chronically ill and reduce reinsurance rates.

"When the DM company is confident enough to put itself under the microscope, the insurer can also feel confident about its choice," adds Rhonda Day, vice president, client services for Health Management Corp. (HMC) in Richmond, Va., which expects full accreditation for its multiple programs after its onsite review this month.

Brian Schilling, a spokesperson for the National Committee for Quality Assurance, sees the new DM component as a merit badge—an independent seal of approval for organizations that will make them more attractive partners for plans and employers.

"Plans will demand that their disease management partners be accredited, or at least, if given a preference, choose one that is," he says.

Annette Duclos-Watson, senior vice president of URAC, adds, "With such wide variation in how DM programs are conducted, accreditation will create consistency for DM through compliance with national guidelines."

All three accrediting bodies focus on program content and operation, performance measurement, clinical information systems, patient-focused program elements, practitioner support and compliance with evidence-based guidelines. They evaluate programs offered by a variety of organizations, including managed care plans, hospitals, provider groups and DM service companies.

To accommodate its new DM accreditation and certification programs, NCQA built an interactive, Web-based program.

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Called the Standards, Guidelines and Assessment Tool, it enables organizations to transfer supporting information and documentation online and to complete a self-assessment prior to the NCQA survey.

By integrating its DM and MCO accreditation programs, NCQA allows MCOs that contract with accredited DM organizations to receive automatic credit for several standards, including health management systems and clinical practice guidelines.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

URAC has established 43 core standards, including policies and procedures, clinical oversight, consumer protection and staff qualifications and management, complemented by 22 DM-specific standards. Like NCQA, it offers accreditation and certification. The cost is about \$15,000 for a single site organization.

JCAHO's DSC Certification is a two-stage process. The first step consists of achieving specific performance measures, including evidence-based, relevant clinical measures chosen by the groups seeking accreditation; patient satisfaction; and program outcomes, such as reduced emergency room use. During the second stage, JCAHO will develop performance measures, initially for congestive heart failure (CHF) and asthma, and integrate them into the performance measurement activities of disease-specific programs and services. The process costs organizations \$9,000.

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FAST FACTS



Accreditation creates consistency

URAC awards this seal when organizations have successfully completed its Disease Management Accreditation Program, a program designed to empower patients by giving them an expanded role in managing their own chronic diseases.



**ACCREDITED
DISEASE MANAGEMENT**

MHE Source: URAC

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Although insurers have not exactly flooded the DM accreditation gates, there are a few early plan adopters.

"Receiving DM accreditation has helped us become better organized internally to meet DM standards," says Dr. Brad Gilbert, medical director of Inland Empire Health Plan, which is NCQA accredited for diabetes, asthma and high-risk obstetrics.

Pam Reinert, director of quality management for Blue Care Network of Michigan, says that NCQA's DM accreditation enables the HMO to showcase its strong DM programs and to confirm its compliance with national standards. "Going through the rig-

are seeing ongoing advancements in the technology surrounding health management and a growing interest in the overall quality delivery of health management programs," says Dr. Robert L. Crocker, corporate medical director for Well-Point and chairman of URAC's DM Advisory Committee.

Although Dr. Alan Sokolow, chief medical officer for Empire BlueCross BlueShield in New York City, believes there are distinct advantages to DM accreditation, he says the plan will not apply for accreditation nor does it influence his choice of vendors. "When a plan does due diligence, it looks at clinical programs, outcomes and customer satisfaction, not at the accreditation itself," he says.

"DM accreditation has helped us become better organized internally."

orous process puts us on a level playing field with our external DM vendors and shows we are up to the challenge," she says. Blue Care is accredited for its diabetes, CHF and asthma programs.

Kaiser Permanente's DM arm, the Care Management Institute, also received NCQA accreditation. Guy Chicione, director of implementation for the institute, says that when NCQA offered the chance to participate in its new accreditation program and to wield some influence over the process, Kaiser grabbed the opportunity.

Cost Care received its DM accreditation from URAC in August for seven diseases. "We

"At a minimum, our accreditation assures customers... a base level of comfort in quality programs we have put in place surrounding patient care that has been outsourced to us," says Dr. Ray L. Gottesfeld, chief medical officer, McKesson Health Solutions.

"LifeMasters maintains a disciplined focus on each of the five disease states that health plans and other payers request most," says Christobel Selecky, LifeMasters CEO. "This is clear recognition of the quality of our programs, the rigorous standards we apply to managing them and our effectiveness in generating positive outcomes for each condition." **MHE**

