

Evidence and value-based medicines: Where does one end and the other begin?

By McLean Robbins

February 12, 2008

The issue of confluence between quality of care and cost was the highlight of yesterday's opening session at the World Congress' Evidence-Based Medicine Summit in Alexandria, Virginia.

Keynote speaker Margaret O'Kane, president of the National Committee for Quality Assurance, began on a hopeful note:

"We're not where we need to be today, [but] we're seeing more and more about what needs to change."

An underlying frustration punctuated by moments of hopefulness permeated the session, mostly attended by physicians and executives of health care organizations, such as Kaiser Permanente, Humana, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals and Blue Cross Blue Shield. A strong presence was also seen from public policy professionals.

Stressing a movement toward quality over cost, O'Kane said that "the voice of the consumer has to be integrated into everything we do."

She explained that measurement drives improvement and that the next phase should be about integrating value and evolving evidence – a confluence of value-based and evidence-based systems.

Measurement metrics are still in the early stages, and accountability is still unclear. The payment system encourages volume and not quality, and costs have reached "alarming levels," O'Kane noted.

"I have a dream that physicians in this country will embrace a value-based agenda," she said, but tempered her remark with the statement that she "[doesn't] think anybody is working where we could be."

The current model of care is too fragmented, O'Kane contended. Organizations should move toward considering a more holistic approach to medicine – considering the

appropriateness of care and patient preferences, with an emphasis placed on informed, shared decision making.

The NCQA is a non-profit health care quality oversight organization founded in 1990. NCQA accredits HMOs and some PPOs and establishes guidelines to recognize high-achieving physicians.

For continuing coverage of the Evidence Based Medicine summit, visit ebn.benefitnews.com and be sure to read Thursday's issue of *inBrief*.