What Is Quality?
(It’s Not What You Think!)

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“Quality” Issues

• Definition of quality
• Historical foundation of medical quality
• The business of healthcare
• The EMR
• Medical error
• Can “quality” be replicated?
Quality Is Often Not What You Think It Is!

• “Quality” is often a disguise for something very different
• Don’t believe your own advertising and theatre; beware of hubris
• “Quality” is an industrial concept: focus on decreasing variation
• Use a systems-oriented approach
Quality Is Often Not What You Think It Is!

- Both process and outcome are important
- All institutional reputations are mortal
- Human failure is both inevitable and predictable
The U.S. spends $2.3 trillion per year on health care — almost twice as much per person as other industrialized nations — but we aren’t getting what we pay for. Studies show that fully a third of spending is wasted on treatments, drugs, and tests that don’t improve Americans’ health outcomes and that adults receive recommended treatments for many illnesses only 55% of the time.

Angela F. Braly President and CEO, WellPoint Inc.
Denis A. Cortese, M.D. President and CEO, Mayo Clinic
Jeffrey B. Kindler Chairman and CEO, Pfizer Inc.
Daniel Vasella, M.D. Chairman and CEO, Novartis AG
Senator Max Baucus (D., Montana)
“To quote Dr. Denis Cortese, ‘It’s real easy for people to say we’re not getting what we’re paying for, which implies you know what quality is. Somebody knows what quality is somewhere.’ That somebody, Dr. Cortese, is the consumer.”

“Concocting grand schemes to measure quality is like measuring the wind with a yardstick—you’ll never grasp it, but you’ll feel it.”

Clara Eaton, RN, BSN
Oakland Park, FL
(Letter, WSJ, 12.03.08)
What Is Quality?

• Medical risk poorly defined
• Medical errors defined by “medical experts”
• Electronic medical records not helpful (yet)
• Surgical data registries just starting
• Evidence-based clinical pathways w/ CQI very rare
• Feasibility of replicating a “high-quality” medical practice unknown
• Definitions of “quality” TNTC
• The Joint Commission???
What is Quality?

“…that kind of care which is expected to maximize a inclusive measure of patient welfare, after one has taken account of the balance of expected gains and losses that attend the process of care in all its parts.”

Avedis Donabedian, 1980
1) Quality: It’s not what you think!
2) The institutional brand/reputation reflects “quality”
3) Quality: Advertising? Hubris? Theatre?
1) Quality: It’s not what **you** think!
2) The institutional brand/reputation reflects “quality”
3) Quality: Advertising? Hubris? Theatre?