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At its finest, U.S. health care is the best in the world, with tremendous advances made over the last several decades in the treatment and diagnosis of cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke and other life-threatening diseases. However, all too often misalignments within the current health care system get in the way of high quality, cost-effective and continuous care. To this end, **the American College of Cardiology (ACC) is taking a leading role in health care reform** efforts by engaging patients, lawmakers, payers and others around a new standard of health care delivery centered on increasing the quality of care and ensuring greater patient value.

Under the organizing principle of **"Quality First,"** the ACC is encouraging health care providers to act on their professional responsibility to transform health care from the inside out.

In current discussions of reform, much time is devoted to access to care and financing of reform. While both are extremely important, cardiovascular professionals can have the most impact on reforming delivery and payment systems to improve quality of care and empower patients.

Rewarding health care practitioners for **providing high quality, cost-effective care** is one of many ways in which quality can be improved. Other ways include: improved coordination across sources and sites of care; a sense of partnership between providers and patients; increased transparency; and a focus on patient value.

The following also must be part of any reform: a renewed focus on reduction in legal and defensive medicine costs; promotion of clinical comparative effectiveness; and a focus on projected workforce issues. The implementation and use of health information technology (IT) is also critical and should be embedded in the systematic practice of quality.

In striving to fulfill its mission of helping cardiovascular professionals provide high quality care, the ACC addresses many of these issues. The ACC is considered a leader in creating clinical guidelines and criteria for the appropriate use of medical technology that are grounded in data collection and professional consensus. It has invested millions in its quality infrastructure, including the largest national cardiovascular data registry. From this work, it is clear the ACC has much to bring to the health care reform discussion.

Through Quality First, the ACC is committed to taking quality care to the next level, by **moving beyond process to focusing on health outcomes**. In addition to its health reform principles, **the ACC has developed a series of action plans** that focus on reducing cardiovascular-related hospital readmission rates; limiting inappropriate imaging; reducing geographic variations in care; encouraging adherence to guidelines; partnering on patient-centered medical home models; ensuring transparency and professionalism; testing payment models that reward quality; and increasing primary and secondary prevention through medication adherence and lifestyle choices.

The ACC firmly believes that carefully crafted partnerships among patients, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Congress, the Obama administration and willing professional societies are critical to enacting real reforms and expediting the progress needed. Each of the College's principles and proposed action plans is designed to move the cardiovascular community – and the nation as a whole – even closer to ensuring the right care, to the right patient, at the right time."

With 43 percent of Medicare dollars spent on heart disease – our country's #1 killer – there is no time like the present to begin transforming health care from the inside out.

Watch a [video overview of Quality First](#) from Cardiosource Video Network.

Quality First Principles

Quality First seeks through the following six principles to reform the current system into one that:

- Provides universal coverage
- Provides coverage through an expansion of public and private (pluralistic) programs
- Focuses on patient value – transparent, high quality, cost-effective, continuous care
- Emphasizes professionalism, the foundation of an effective partnership with empowered patients
- Ensures coordination across sources and sites of care
- Includes payment reforms that reward quality and ensure value