



Principles on Equity of Care

America's Essential Hospitals December 2014

Members of America's Essential Hospitals provide high-quality care for all, including the most vulnerable. These essential hospitals not only shoulder a disproportionate share of the nation's uncompensated care, they are also at the forefront of cutting-edge medical research and innovation that continues to improve the quality of care received by all patients. And through their work with underserved populations, essential hospitals have uniquely focused on the needs and challenges of vulnerable patient populations, most of whom are of diverse racial or ethnic origins, are low-income, and struggle with social issues such as food, transportation, or housing insecurity. This commitment to promote equity of care and eliminate disparities for the underserved places these hospitals in a unique position within the health care delivery system. As policymakers discuss improvements to innovative pay-for-performance programs, we urge them to consider the following principles:

1. As a country, we must remain committed to eliminating disparities in health and health care. And health care providers should strive to achieve equity of care for all patients, regardless of the patients' socioeconomic and socio-demographic characteristics.
2. The broader community, including governmental entities, health care providers, social service and community organizations, academic institutions, employer groups, and all individuals, must be involved in developing and implementing solutions to effectively eliminate disparities.
3. Health care providers should work proactively with their communities to better understand and address the health care and social needs of those who live and work in the community. Efforts to promote equity of care and eliminate disparities must recognize the community's distinctive needs.
4. Patient engagement must be a core component of a health care provider's efforts to address disparities and ensure equity of care. Such engagement should include directly involving patients and their families in decisions about their own care and should be in line with patients' expectations for the health care encounter and how it relates to their overall health goals.

5. Communities must be served by a health care workforce that possesses competencies to address the needs of diverse populations. In addition, the cultural backgrounds of the health care workforce must parallel those who live and work in the community. The health care workforce pipeline also must include future professionals who reflect the population in the communities these professionals will serve.
6. Innovative and novel approaches, as well as evidence-based best practices for addressing disparities, should be embraced, practiced, supported, and shared. At the broader community level, investments should be made in conducting and translating research into successful practices, replicating such practices, and disseminating findings.
7. All health care professionals must have ongoing cultural competency training to better serve patients in their communities.
8. There is a need for accurate data on patients' socioeconomic and socio-demographic characteristics, including, but not limited to, self-reported race, ethnicity, and preferred language. All health care professionals and others working in the delivery system must be trained on collecting accurate socioeconomic and socio-demographic data and educating patients on why such data are being collected.
9. To successfully eliminate disparities, all health care professionals need an accurate, reliable and real-time business intelligence infrastructure to analyze the socio-economic data collected from their patients and translate into practice the learnings from that analysis.
10. Incentives across the health care delivery and payment system need to be aligned to promote equity of care and eliminate disparities.
11. In designing new payment systems, special recognition and financial support should be given to providers who disproportionately deliver care to disadvantaged populations with health and healthcare disparities.