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A Message from the Executive Director AQAF membership could be good for practicing physicians

by Larry Dixon

Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation (AQAF) is unique to this state because it is a physician-sponsored organization, and physician involvement is essential to its success as the state's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization (QIO). All practicing Alabama physicians with staff privileges in a healthcare facility on a regular basis are allowed to become members. Becoming a member puts you under no obligation and membership is free.

AQAF is a private non-profit organization that contracts with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide direct technical assistance to Alabama physicians, hospitals and nursing homes to improve the value of healthcare services that are paid for by Medicare. AQAF does this by helping healthcare providers align care processes with national standards that are clearly linked to better patient outcomes. Because AQAF's work focuses on many common diagnoses and procedures, and on healthcare providers who are in greatest need of improvement, it benefits all patients regardless of insurance status.

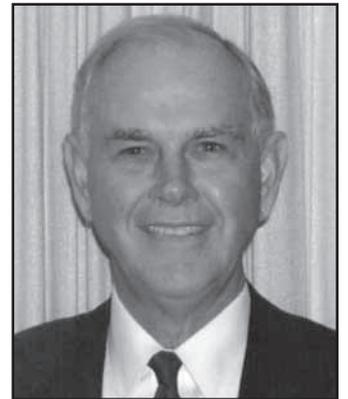
AQAF staff offer healthcare providers a wide range of expertise that helps them build the internal capacity to sustain and expand quality improvement initiatives. This expertise encompasses quality improvement techniques like root cause and failure mode effects analysis, as well as intra-team communication, clinical data collection, intervention design, survey administration and statistical analysis.

AQAF's work builds on a growing base of scientific evidence about the most effective strategies for improving healthcare quality and efficiency. AQAF is expected to achieve results, and is held accountable by CMS for the performance of the healthcare providers that it assists. In the current three-year program with CMS, AQAF is focusing on the following priorities:

- Beneficiary protection. Protecting the rights of Alabama's more than 800,000 Medicare beneficiaries who are concerned about the quality of their healthcare.
- Patient safety. Improving the safety of care in Alabama's nursing homes and hospitals by decreasing rates of pressure ulcers, physical restraints and MRSA, and by improving inpatient surgical safety and hospital care for heart failure.
- Prevention. Increasing rates of screening mammography, colorectal screening, and flu and pneumonia vaccination by helping primary care physicians make effective use of electronic health records.
- Care transitions. Improving patient transitions from the hospital to home, skilled nursing care or home healthcare with the goal of reducing unnecessary hospital readmissions.

The physician members of AQAF elected me as an AQAF board member in a public member capacity. As the Executive Director of the Board of Medical

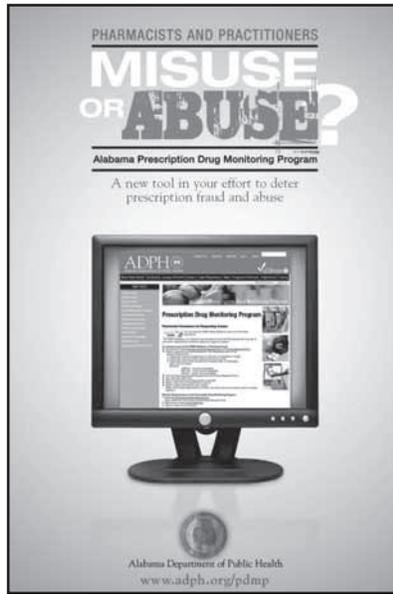
see *AQAF membership*, page 3



Larry Dixon

PDMP database system upgraded

Effective Feb. 1, 2011, the Alabama Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) requires the use of the most recent version of the American Society for Automation in Pharmacy (ASAP 2007, 4.1) for submitting dispensing information. All physicians listed in the Board's database as dispensing physicians were sent a letter from the PDMP in November 2010 informing them of this required upgrade.



Dispensing physicians are those physicians who order quantities of controlled substances for repackaging and sale to the patient. All controlled substances dispensed must be reported to the PDMP, and the physician must be registered with the Board as a dispensing physician. Providing samples and starter packs to patients is not considered dispensing. If you received the letter from the

PDMP and do not think you should be registered as a dispensing physician, please contact Board Investigative Specialist Tammy Davis. If you are a dispensing physician but did not receive the letter, your information may not be correct in the Board's files. You can look yourself up in the Board's online licensee database to see if you are registered as a dispensing physician or not.

On the Net:

PDMP website:

<http://www.adph.org/pdmp/>

Board's website on dispensing:

<http://www.albme.org>

Board's licensee search website:

<http://www.albme.org>

AQAF membership

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Examiners, the agency responsible for patient health and safety, I quickly realized AQAF's ability to help its physician members with their patients. Let me encourage each Alabama physician committed to healthcare quality and the ability to foster positive change to consider AQAF membership. For those wishing to join, as I said earlier, there is never a fee or charge.

To join AQAF as a physician member, there is a membership form and fax/ mailing instructions at the AQAF website: <http://www.aqaf.com>.

PAs controlled substances prescribing protocol

A standard protocol was adopted for PAs prescribing controlled substances pursuant to a Qualified Alabama Controlled Substances Certificate. The protocol states as follows:

1. The quantity of a controlled substance initially prescribed by a Physician Assistant (PA) shall be limited to a fourteen (14) day supply, and any refill must be authorized by the supervising physician. The supervising physician must see the patient before authorizing a refill.
2. If a prescription for a controlled substance is initiated by the supervising physician, the P.A. may authorize only one (1) refill for a thirty (30) day supply of the medication.
3. A PA may make a verbal order for a controlled substance under the circumstances stated in this protocol.

PA approval for joint injections

Reminder: Joint injections are not a part of the standard PA job description. This additional skill must be requested and approved by the Board.

Physician Monitoring Coordinator to retire



James B. "Jim" Hulett has announced his retirement effective July 6, 2011. Mr. Hulett was employed by the Board in 1990 to

monitor physician compliance with public or confidential agreements made with the Board, the Commission, and the Alabama Physician Health Program (APHP) and to report the physicians' compliance to the Board or Commission. He has served as the Board's liaison with the APHP and fostered a positive relationship with them as well as with physician health programs across the nation.

Jim will be succeeded by current Board Investigator Jeff Grimsley.