



For Immediate Release

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12 health care organizations selected for national leadership program to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health care

BOSTON – May 21, 2009 –Twelve health care organizations – including hospitals, health plans, and community health centers– from around the United States have been selected to participate in a year-long executive leadership program designed to tackle racial and ethnic disparities in health care.

The **Disparities Leadership Program**, the first program of its kind in the nation, is designed for leaders from hospitals, health insurance plans, and other health care organizations who are seeking to develop practical strategies to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health care. This will be the third year of the program, which was launched in 2007. The program is led by the Disparities Solutions Center (DSC) at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in Boston, Massachusetts.

The goal of the Disparities Leadership Program is to create a cadre of health care leaders who have:

- in-depth knowledge of the research and causes of health care disparities;
- cutting-edge, quality improvement strategies and skills to address disparities; and
- leadership skills to implement solutions to help transform their organizations.

Participants include:

Health Plans

- BlueCross BlueShield of TN, Chattanooga, TN
- Keystone Mercy Health Plan, Philadelphia, PA
- Neighborhood Health Plan, Boston, MA

Hospitals

- Alameda County Medical Center, Oakland, CA
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Baltimore, MD
- Children’s Hospital Boston, Boston, MA

- Children’s Mercy Hospital and Clinics, Kansas City, MO
- HealthEast Care System, St. Paul, MN
- Kaiser Permanent Northern California, Fremont, CA
- University of New Mexico Hospitals, Albuquerque, NM

Community Health Centers

- Concilio de Salud Integral de Loiza, Loiza, Puerto Rico
- St. Thomas Community Health Center, New Orleans, LA

“This program is about developing new leaders and taking action. It is about helping individuals and their health care organizations understand the critical connection between improving quality and eliminating disparities in care through a concerted, coordinated effort to change our health care system,” said Joseph R. Betancourt, MD, MPH, Director of the Disparities Solutions Center at MGH, and a member of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Committee, which produced the 2002 landmark report *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. This report revealed striking disparities in the quality of health care services delivered to minority and white patients -- even for patients of the same socioeconomic background and access to care. “These health care organizations are clearly distinguishing themselves as national leaders by taking action to identify and address disparities,” Dr. Betancourt said.

Created in July 2005 as the nation’s first, hospital-based disparities center, the Disparities Solutions Center at MGH has significant experience in addressing racial and ethnic disparities in care. The Center has worked with several leading health plans across the country (Aetna, Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Florida, among others) to develop strategies to identify and eliminate disparities. In addition, DSC faculty have staffed the Massachusetts General Hospital Committee on Racial and Ethnic Disparities, pioneering activities such as the Disparities Dashboard, an innovative way to identify and monitor disparities, as well as the development of a culturally competent diabetes disease management program. The DSC faculty have also played an important role in the well-recognized effort among Boston hospitals to eliminate disparities under the leadership of Mayor Menino. These experiences have uniquely positioned DSC faculty to provide training to those interested in addressing disparities through quality improvement.

The Disparities Leadership Program is jointly sponsored by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), and supported by Joint Commission Resources (JCR), an affiliate of the Joint Commission.

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