

Using the Toolkit to explain evidence-based health care



Contents

What is the purpose of this Toolkit?	1
How the Toolkit gives you a head start communicating with employees	1
Exhibit 1.	
Topic areas and titles of the Communication Toolkit's workforce materials	2
Five essential features of the Toolkit's workforce materials	3
Topics covered by the workforce materials	12
Customizing and distributing the workforce materials.....	14
Reinforcing the message of evidence-based health care	16
Acknowledgments and references	17

What is the purpose of this Toolkit?

This Toolkit is designed to help you educate your employees about evidence-based health care. The Toolkit contains materials to use with your workforce (“workforce materials”) that can help your employees:

- Make better health care decisions.
- Assume more “ownership” over their health care.
- Increase their ability to take on new behaviors to improve their health and health care.

“Evidence-based health care” emphasizes such values as using medical evidence and quality standards to make decisions; reducing the underuse, misuse, and overuse of health care resources; and encouraging consumers to be actively involved in their own health care. Evidence-based health care is increasingly important as employers look for ways to improve the quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of health care.

How the Toolkit gives you a head start communicating with employees

For employees, using evidence-based health care means thinking about their health and health care in new ways. This can lead to confusion, uncertainty, and misconceptions. Because of this, communicating with employees about evidence-based health care isn’t easy.

The Toolkit workforce materials can give you a head start in your communications.

The Toolkit workforce materials are based on extensive research. The workforce materials reflect and incorporate what we learned from research about the best way to communicate with employees about evidence-based health care. This research included testing the Toolkit workforce materials with a diverse group of union and non-union employees.

Employees understand the Toolkit workforce materials and find them useful. Based on our testing, we know that employees respond well to the materials and think that they are helpful (for details, see *Acknowledgments and References* at the end of this document).

The Toolkit workforce materials can be customized to meet the needs of your organization. We learned that a critical part of building employees' trust and confidence is communicating what your organization is doing to promote and support evidence-based health care and why you are doing it. Because no two organizations are alike, we designed the Toolkit workforce materials so that you can easily customize them to include information and examples that reflect your organization's goals, priorities, and activities.

The Toolkit workforce materials cover topics that are important to employers and employees. We talked to both employers and employees to determine which topics were important. The Toolkit workforce materials cover four topics areas that were of interest to both groups and about which employees had misconceptions or said they needed more information (Exhibit 1). You can find more detailed descriptions of these topic areas beginning on page 12 of this document.

Exhibit 1

Topic areas and titles of the *Communication Toolkit's* workforce materials

Topic Area 1 **Understanding the basics of health care quality and the importance of evidence-based information** (11 documents)

- Good quality health care: What it is and why you can't take it for granted
- How do we know which types of health care work best?
- Information about health care quality: What it is and tips on how to find it
- How you can use information about health care quality to get better care: Seven examples

Topic Area 2 **Cost and quality—how to choose quality and make wise use of money spent on health care** (4 documents)

- Making wise use of money spent on health care: Let's put quality first
- To get better health care, be informed and involved
- Tips for getting the care that works best for your condition
- Tips for getting the right amount of care

Topic Area 3 **Tips for getting good quality care before, during, and after a health care appointment** (4 documents)

- Summary of tips for getting good quality health care before, during, and after a health care appointment
- Tips on what to do before your health care appointment
- Tips on what to do during your health care appointment
- Tips for following through on treatment and managing your health

Topic Area 4 **Help in using the internet to find health information you can trust** (2 documents)

- Health information on the internet: A checklist to help you judge which websites to trust
- A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information

Five essential features of the Toolkit's workforce materials

This section describes and shows examples of five features that distinguish the Toolkit workforce materials. We call them “essential features” because our research and testing showed that these features are key in helping employees understand and use the information.

These features are based in part on a detailed set of guidelines for writing and designing materials to make them clear and effective for readers with a broad range of literacy skills (see *Acknowledgments and References* at the end of this document).

Essential features

- 1** The workforce materials explain difficult or unfamiliar concepts in ways that are easy for employees to understand.
- 2** To help employees remember and apply new information, the workforce materials reinforce key messages and include vignette examples.
- 3** The workforce materials are formatted to look approachable and be easy to skim.
- 4** To support and motivate employees, the workforce materials are action oriented. They tell employees what specific things they can do, what the benefits will be, and where they can learn more.
- 5** The workforce materials include places for you to insert text that tells what the company or union is doing to promote and support evidence-based care and why this is important.



Essential feature 1:

The workforce materials explain difficult or unfamiliar concepts in ways that are easy for employees to understand.

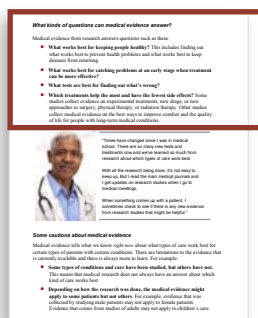
The topic of evidence-based health care is complex and unfamiliar to employees. Our research and testing of materials show that employees need more than just a brief discussion of this topic to understand it well. To help employees understand and use information about evidence-based health care, the workforce materials use a number of techniques that are described below.

The materials provide reader-centered discussions of basic concepts and main themes. To give employees a foundation for understanding and applying evidence-based health care to their own lives, the materials present basic concepts and main themes from the perspective of the reader. For example, the materials:

- Tell what is meant by quality health care.
- Explain and document that quality of care varies and therefore the reader should not be taking quality of care for granted.

- Explain how evidence from medical research is the basis for determining which types of care work best.
- Encourage employees to become better informed by finding and using information that is based on evidence from medical research.
- Encourage employees to ask questions and be actively involved in making health care decisions and managing their own health.
- Encourage employees to do their part in choosing quality and helping make wise use of money spent on health care.

To define key concepts and terms, the Toolkit workforce materials use simple language accompanied by concrete examples. Our research shows that employees have trouble understanding terms like “medical evidence,” “quality standards,” and “guidelines.” The Toolkit workforce materials use plain language to define each of these terms and then give examples to make the definition more concrete. An example of how we define medical evidence is shown below.



SOURCE: page 2 of
*How do we know which types
of health care work best?*

What kinds of questions can medical evidence answer?

Medical evidence from research answers questions such as these:

- **What works best for keeping people healthy?** This includes finding out what works best to prevent health problems and what works best to keep diseases from returning.
- **What works best for catching problems at an early stage when treatment can be more effective?**
- **What tests are best for finding out what’s wrong?**
- **Which treatments help the most and have the fewest side effects?** Some studies collect evidence on experimental treatments, new drugs, or new approaches to surgery, physical therapy, or radiation therapy. Other studies collect medical evidence on the best ways to improve comfort and the quality of life for people with long-term medical conditions.

Gives specific examples to help people understand what is meant by “medical evidence.”

The materials introduce and explain key concepts one at a time. To help employees understand and absorb complex information, the materials take a step-by-step approach that adds cohesion by making connections explicit. The first step is to introduce a new concept and explain it. Then, building on that explanation, the next step is to add another concept and tell how it is connected. For example, here is a sequence of topics in the workforce document titled *How do we know which types of health care work best?*

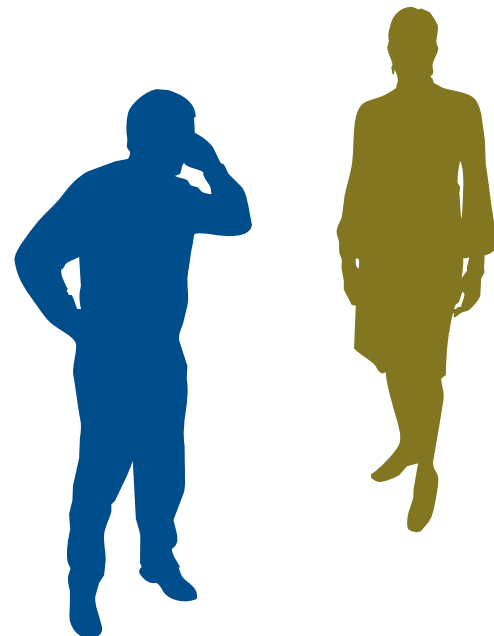
- The document starts by defining and explaining the concept of “medical evidence.”
- Then, building on the discussion of medical evidence, the document introduces the concept of how medical evidence can be used to set standards for quality care.
- Finally, it uses discussion and an example to tell how health professionals can use standards for quality of care as guidelines for giving their patients good quality care.

The Toolkit workforce materials have been tested to help ensure that employees understand and correctly interpret the language used. To test the workforce documents, we conducted individual interviews with employees to get their reactions to draft versions of the materials. The feedback from interviews with employees was crucial for helping us refine the content, graphic design, and tone of the workforce materials.

Typically, after we had tested the initial version of a document and used the feedback to make revisions, we conducted at least one more round of additional testing to verify how well the changes were working. In all, we conducted five separate rounds of testing in five different geographic locations. Most of the workforce documents were tested two or three times.

Here is an example that shows how we used results from testing to improve wording in a document:

- An earlier version of materials about the connections between cost and quality of health care included the phrase *getting good value for the money*.
- Testing showed that some readers attached negative connotations to this phrase. To them, it suggested a need to seek cut-rate bargains, and they did not like the idea of applying this approach to their health care. Some remarked that it sounded like employers were putting a “value” on their health.
- When we replaced the phrase *getting good value for the money* with the phrase *wise use of money spent on health care*, employees reacted positively—both to the phrase and to the discussion of cost and quality in which the phrase was used.



Essential feature 2:

To help employees remember and apply new information, the workforce materials reinforce key messages and include vignette examples.

The materials use short, take-home messages to emphasize key concepts. When we tested the workforce materials, employees said that these short messages were helpful. Here are some examples:

- Be informed about and involved in your health care
- Ask questions and learn more
- Make wise use of money spent on health care

The materials use vignette examples to add appeal, reinforce understanding, and help employees see the personal relevance of the information. Some workforce materials include photos with an accompanying brief story about a real-life situation. Testing showed that

employees responded very positively to these vignettes. These concrete examples drew their interest, enhanced their understanding, and helped them apply the new information to their own lives.

Some of the workforce materials are based entirely on vignettes. It is called *How you can use information about health care quality to get better care: Seven examples*.

Using personal stories together with photos and links to other resources, these documents show how people can use information about health care quality to do such things as make treatment decisions, avoid using treatment that has been shown to be ineffective, get good quality surgical care, check on whether the care they are getting meets quality standards, keep up to date on preventive care, and choose a new health care provider.

Below is an example that shows a vignette from another one of the workforce documents.

SOURCE: page 3 of

Tips for getting the care that works best for your condition

As you can see, this photo is watermarked as a “sample photo.” For details on how to use this and other sample photos in the workforce materials, see a later section in this document titled *Customizing the workforce materials*.

The photo adds appeal and draws the reader’s attention.

A key point is highlighted by special formatting that draws attention and helps reinforce the message.

“When I injured my back, my doctor went over the research on different treatments and how well they work. For my kind of injury, the research said that physical therapy and medication usually work just as well or better than surgery.

I was happy to hear it. I didn’t want a back operation unless I really needed it. It takes so long to recover plus with any operation there’s always some risk.

If I had needed the surgery, my insurance would have covered it and that’s good to know. But then, even if I’m not paying, why waste money on treatment that costs more and doesn’t work any better?”

Did you know that . . . you can’t judge the quality of your care by how much it costs

- **The best type of treatment for your condition might cost less than other types of care that don’t work as well.** Sometimes good quality care does cost more, but often it does not. And just because care costs a lot does not make it good quality care.
- **Keep in mind that the cost of getting poor quality care can be very high –** sometimes far higher than the cost of getting good quality care.
 - For example, suppose that instead of getting the treatment that works best, you are given a different treatment that doesn’t work very well. Since the treatment doesn’t work very well, your health problem might get worse. In the end, the problem might cost much more to treat.
 - When mistakes are made in medical care, the cost of extra care that is needed to fix a medical mistake can be very expensive.
 - Also, poor care includes being given care that you don’t really need, and the cost of unnecessary tests and treatment can be very high.

This vignette uses a personal example to introduce the following messages:

- Employees should talk with their health care providers about what the medical evidence says about their treatment options.
- Higher costs do not necessarily indicate higher quality of care.
- Getting more care does not necessarily mean better care.
- Getting “less” care can mean getting high quality care that is the “right” care.

This text that follows the vignette discusses and reinforces messages that are introduced in the vignette.

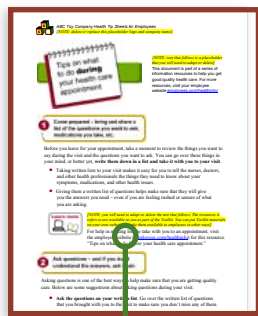
The main themes related to evidence-based health care are developed and reinforced in various ways throughout the entire set of workforce materials. Incorporating and repeating main themes helps people understand, absorb, and apply new information.

Repetition of basic concepts from one piece of material to another also provides enough context for each piece to be used independently. This is important because, depending on how you customize and distribute the workforce materials, it is possible that an employee might read only one piece of material and that different employees might read the same set of materials in a different sequence. (A later section in this document addresses how to customize the workforce materials.)

Essential feature 3:
The workforce materials are formatted to look approachable and be easy to skim.

If written material looks like a dense wall of words, people have little interest in reading it. To make the Toolkit workforce materials look appealing, approachable, and easy to skim, the materials use informative headings, bulleted points, numbered lists, bolding of key points, pictures, graphic accents, and ample white space.

SOURCE: page 1 of
Tips on what do during your health care appointment



All workforce documents have a Microsoft Word file for you to download and adapt. These files include embedded instructions to you on how to customize the documents.

These instructions are in italics and highlighted in yellow. You can see them in the tiny picture of this page shown above.

Because you will remove these highlighted instructions before you use the document with employees, we have removed them from the enlarged page to the right.

ABC Toy Company Health Tip Sheets for Employees

Tips on what to do during your health care appointment

This document is part of a series of information resources to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit your employee website employees.com/healthinfo/

1 Come prepared – bring and share a list of the questions you want to ask, medications you take, etc.

Before you leave for your appointment, take a moment to review the things you want to say during the visit and the questions you want to ask. You can go over these things in your mind, or better yet, **write them down in a list and take it with you to your visit.**

- Taking written lists to your visit makes it easy for you to tell the nurses, doctors, and other health professionals the things they need to know about your symptoms, medications, and other health issues.
- Giving them a written list of questions helps make sure that they will give you the answers you need – even if you are feeling rushed or unsure of what you are asking.

Learn more For help in making lists to take with you to an appointment, visit the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo/) for this resource: “Tips on what to do before your health care appointment.”

2 Ask questions – and if you don’t understand the answers, ask again

Asking questions is one of the best ways to help make sure that you are getting quality care. Below are some suggestions about asking questions during your visit.

- **Ask the questions on your written list.** Go over the written list of questions that you brought with you to the visit to make sure you don’t miss any of them.

Accent formatting (spiral pad, green band) adds visual interest that draws attention to the title and makes the material look more approachable.

This prominent reference alerts readers that the document is part of a series that can be found at the company’s employee website (you would delete this part if it’s not applicable).

Numbered list of action steps gives people specific things that they can do. Formatting makes the action steps easy to skim.

Bulleted points make the document easy to skim.

The “learn more” icon adds visual interest and emphasis. It is used throughout the workforce materials to indicate suggested resources.

There is ample “white space” and the text is broken into blocks. This layout is uncrowded and looks easy to read.

Essential feature 4:

To support and motivate employees, the workforce materials are action oriented. They tell employees what specific things they can do, what the benefits will be, and where they can learn more.

From our research and testing of materials with employees, we know that employees respond positively to practical information that helps them know specific things they can do to take more responsibility and help make sure that they are getting good quality care.

As shown in the example below, the Toolkit workforce materials help by giving employees action-oriented tips and direct links to resources that offer more information.

- Some of the links in the workforce materials are to resources on government and other websites.
- Some links refer the reader to other workforce materials that are available to you as part of the Toolkit. For more about this, see the section later in this document that addresses customizing and distributing the workforce materials.

SOURCE: page 5 of
*Making wise use of money
spent on health care:
Let's put quality first*



5 Get timely care (go in for care as soon as you need it; stay on schedule with preventive care and follow-up visits)

Delays in getting care can lead to more serious health problems that are more difficult and more costly to treat.

- Since you are the one who usually decides when it's time to get care, do your best to get care as soon as you think you need it.
- To help catch any health problems at an early stage, stay up to date on your screening tests and other preventive care.

Learn more

The government has created guides for women and men that tell what preventive care you need, depending on your age. You can find these guides called *Stay Healthy at Any Age, Your Checklist for Health* at www.ahrq.gov/pf/p

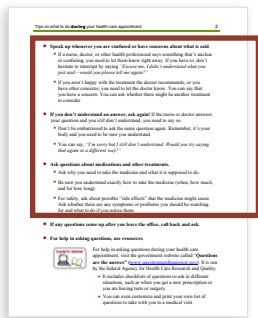
Tells what the employees can do to get care that is “timely.”

Tells why timely care is important (both for quality of care and for wise use of resources).

Web link to resources where employees can learn more about specific things to do.

We know that some situations can be especially challenging for employees. For example, some people find it intimidating to ask for a second opinion or to speak up when they are talking with a health provider during an office visit. For these types of challenging situations, the workforce materials include specific coaching that is written with a supportive tone. An example is shown below.

SOURCE: page 2 of
Tips on what to do during your health care appointment



- **Speak up whenever you are confused or have concerns about what is said.**
 - If a nurse, doctor, or other health professional says something that's unclear or confusing, you need to let them know right away. If you have to, don't hesitate to interrupt by saying, "Excuse me, I didn't understand what you just said—would you please tell me again?"
 - If you aren't happy with the treatment the doctor recommends, or you have other concerns, you need to let the doctor know. You can say that you have a concern. You can ask whether there might be another treatment to consider.
- **If you don't understand an answer, ask again!** If the nurse or doctor answers your question and you *still* don't understand, you need to say so.
 - Don't be embarrassed to ask the same question again. Remember, it's your body and you need to be sure you understand.
 - You can say, "I'm sorry but I still don't understand. Would you try saying that again in a different way?"
- **Ask questions about medications and other treatments.**
 - Ask why you need to take the medicine and what it is supposed to do.
 - Be sure you understand exactly how to take the medicine (when, how much, and for how long).
 - For safety, ask about possible "side effects" that the medicine might cause. Ask whether there are any symptoms or problems you should be watching for and what to do if you notice them.

To model what a patient can say, the material includes specific dialogue that is both direct and tactful.

Anticipates that a patient may need to be persistent. Gives specific tips on what to do.

Offers support and encouragement about how to do something that can be hard for a patient—expressing concerns or questioning the health professional's advice.

Essential feature 5:

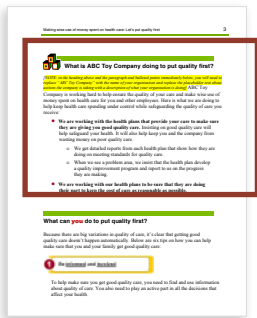
The workforce materials include places for you to insert text that tells what the company or union is doing to promote and support evidence-based care and why this is important.

The Toolkit workforce materials are designed to help employees understand that evidence-based health care is a shared responsibility—not theirs alone. Our research shows that some employees worry that they will be expected to assume sole or primary responsibility for ensuring that they get good quality, cost-effective care. This can feel overwhelming to them. (For a report about research done for the Toolkit, see Acknowledgments and References at the end of this document.)

To help reassure employees that the company views safeguarding the quality of care for employees as a shared responsibility, the workforce materials contain places where you can insert descriptions of what your company is doing to promote and support evidence-based health care. Providing this type of information helps alleviate suspicions that many employees have—such as believing that employers care more about saving money than keeping employees healthy.

SOURCE: page 3 of Making wise use of money spent on health care: Let's put quality first

This excerpt shows sample text for the fictional ABC Toy Company. It's just a placeholder to show where you can insert a description about what your own company or union is doing.



What is ABC Toy Company doing to put quality first?

[NOTE: in the heading above and the paragraph and bulleted points immediately below, you will need to replace "ABC Toy Company" with the name of your organization and replace the placeholder text about actions the company is taking with a description of what your organization is doing.] ABC Toy Company is working hard to help ensure the quality of your care and make wise use of money spent on health care for you and other employees. Here is what we are doing to help keep health care spending under control while safeguarding the quality of care you receive:

- We are working with the health plans that provide your care to make sure they are giving you good quality care. Insisting on good quality care will help safeguard your health. It will also help keep you and the company from wasting money on poor quality care.
 - We get detailed reports from each health plan that show how they are doing on meeting standards for quality care.
 - When we see a problem area, we insist that the health plan develop a quality improvement program and report to us on the progress they are making.
- We are working with our health plans to be sure that they are doing their part to keep the cost of care as reasonable as possible.

Providing specific examples will help reassure employees. It lets them know that quality of care is a priority for the company, and it shows that the company is following through by taking action.

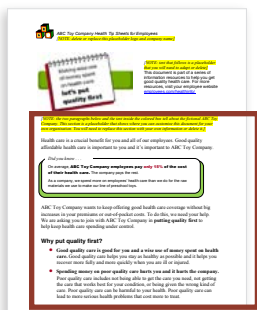
The sample text about ABC Toy Company shown here focuses on monitoring the quality of health plans offered by the company and working to keep the “cost of care as reasonable as possible.”

Other possible topics include how the company uses information about quality to help select which plans to offer to employees and how the company has designed particular health benefits to help make sure that employees receive quality care.

The workforce materials are designed to help employees understand why employers are emphasizing evidence-based health care. We learned from our research that many employees are unaware of the active and important role that employers can play in monitoring the quality of care that employees and their families are receiving when they use their health care benefits. Many employees are also unaware of the total cost of health care for employees and their families and how much of this total is paid by the employer. Employees therefore don't understand that their company has a shared interest in ensuring that employees make wise use of money spent on health care by getting good quality, cost-effective care.

Some of the Toolkit workforce materials include places where you can insert text to help employees understand why you, as an employer, are concerned about ensuring that they get good quality care that makes wise use of money spent on health care.

SOURCE: page 1 of
Making wise use of money spent on health care: Let's put quality first



This note with yellow highlighting tells you that this section is placeholder text about ABC Toy Company. You can replace this section with discussion that is tailored to your own organization.

[NOT: The two paragraphs below and the text inside the colored box tell about the fictional ABC Toy Company. This section is a placeholder that shows where you can customize this document for your own organization. You will need to replace this section with your own information or delete it.]

Health care is a crucial benefit for you and all of our employees. Good quality affordable health care is important to you and it's important to ABC Toy Company.

Did you know . . .

On average, **ABC Toy Company employees pay only 15% of the cost of their health care.** The company pays the rest.

As a company, we spend more on employees' health care than we do for the raw materials we use to make our line of preschool toys.

ABC Toy Company wants to keep offering good health care coverage without big increases in your premiums or out-of-pocket costs. To do this, we need your help. We are asking you to join with ABC Toy Company in **putting quality first** to help keep health care spending under control.

Why put quality first?

- **Good quality care is good for you and a wise use of money spent on health care.** Good quality care helps you stay as healthy as possible and it helps you recover more fully and more quickly when you are ill or injured.
- **Spending money on poor quality care hurts you and it hurts the company.** Poor quality care includes not being able to get the care you need, not getting the care that works best for your condition, or being given the wrong kind of care. Poor quality care can be harmful to your health. Poor quality care can lead to more serious health problems that cost more to treat.

Many employees are unaware of how much they (as a group) pay toward the total cost of their health care. Including a concrete comparison to another company expense (raw materials for making toys) helps put this cost information in a bigger context.

This section discusses how quality and cost are connected, focusing on how poor quality care affects employees. It emphasizes that good quality care is good both for employees and for the company.

Topics covered by the workforce materials

Topic areas

- 1 Understanding the basics of health care quality and the importance of evidence-based information
- 2 Cost and quality—how to choose quality and make wise use of money spent on health care
- 3 Tips for getting good quality care before, during, and after a health care appointment
- 4 Help in using the internet to find health information you can trust

Topic Area 1: Understanding the basics of health care quality and the importance of evidence-based information

Materials in this topic area

- Good quality health care: What it is and why you can't take it for granted (4 pages)
- How do we know which types of health care work best? (8 pages)
- Information about health care quality: What it is (6 pages) and how to find it (2 pages)
- How you can use information about health care quality to get better care: Seven examples (Each example is 3 pages or less)

People often think that they already know about quality of health care, but our research showed significant misconceptions and information gaps. For example, employees think that if they like and trust their health care provider, the provider will ensure that they are getting quality care. Employees also think that “bad quality care” is something that they will be able to recognize when they see it.

Many employees are unaware that information is available to help them judge the quality of the health care they are receiving. Or they may have heard about such information but don't know how to find it or how to use it.

The Toolkit workforce materials in this first topic area address information gaps and common misconceptions. These documents will help employees understand what it means to get “good quality” health care and why choosing quality is important. The materials will help employees judge whether the care they are getting is the most effective care, as determined by medical evidence and quality standards. The materials also encourage employees to seek information about quality and provide resources as well as specific examples to help them. In addition, the documents include places to inform employees about what the company is doing to help ensure quality care.

Topic Area 2: Cost and quality—how to choose quality and make wise use of money spent on health care

Materials in this topic area

- Making wise use of money spent on health care: Let's put quality first (7 pages)
- To get better health care, be informed and involved (5 pages)
- Tips for getting the care that works best for your condition (4 pages)
- Tips for getting the right amount of care (as much care as you need but no unnecessary care) (4 pages)

Employers are trying to control the rising costs of health care and help employees make good health care decisions that make wise use of resources. However, employees often react negatively when the topic of health care cost is raised. Regardless of employers' motivations, employees are suspicious that evidence-based health care is all about saving money.

When thinking about what it means to get good quality care, some employees have misconceptions that affect how they think about the cost of health care. For example, employees generally believe that good quality care costs more and that the more care a person gets, the better. Many employees don't know how much money their company is paying for health care, or even that their employer pays *anything* for their health care.

Our research shows that employees tend to be more receptive to discussions about the cost of care when the following two messages are combined:

1. Putting quality first (framing it in terms of “wise use” of money spent on health care)
2. Telling what the **company** is doing to ensure the wise use of money spent on health care

The Toolkit workforce materials in this second topic area will help employees understand what it means to make wise use of money spent on health care and how putting quality first helps accomplish this. The materials have placeholders where you can insert text that tells employees what your organization is doing to put quality first. The materials also tell specific ways in which employees can put quality first, including how to be informed and involved, get the care that works best for specific conditions, get the right amount of care, get care that is as safe as possible, get timely care, and stay healthy.

Topic Area 3: Tips for getting good quality care before, during, and after a health care appointment

Materials in this topic area

- Summary of tips for getting good quality health care before, during, and after a health care appointment (2 pages)
- Tips on what to do before your health care appointment (4 pages)
- Tips on what to do during your health care appointment (4 pages)
- Tips for following through on treatment and managing your health (4 pages)

To help employees become better informed about quality and more actively involved in their own health care, specific guidance can be helpful. The workforce materials in this third topic area provide practical tips that focus on what to do before, during, and after a health care appointment. The one-page document has a brief description of the tips. The companion documents give employees the details on these tips and provide links to further resources. These materials

will help empower employees and make them feel more confident about their ability to take more responsibility for their own health care.

Topic Area 4: Help in using the internet to find health information you can trust

Materials in this topic area

- Health information on the internet: A checklist to help you judge which websites to trust (7 pages)
- A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information (5 pages)

Many people turn to the internet for health information. However, in talking with employees, we found that it can be hard for them to know whether the information they find on the internet is trustworthy.

The Toolkit workforce materials in this last topic area include a checklist of specific ways to assess whether a website has health information that is based on solid medical research. The workforce materials also include a list of recommended websites that offer health information that is reliable, trustworthy, and up-to-date. When we tested these materials, employees were enthusiastic about their usefulness.

These workforce materials about health information on websites *are an easy, non-threatening way to get people more involved and more interested in the topic of evidence-based health care*. Although employees may struggle to understand concepts related to health care quality and costs, they find it easy to understand the value of finding reliable, trustworthy information about their health care, diagnosis, condition, or treatment.

Customizing and distributing the workforce materials

How to customize the Toolkit workforce materials

Because each company is different, the Toolkit’s workforce materials have been designed as flexible resources that you can adapt and use in many ways to suit your needs. Below is a summary of things you need to know about customizing the workforce materials. (For the details, see *How to Customize the Toolkit Workforce: Technical help in adapting text and photos*; see *Acknowledgments and References* at the end of this document.)

The workforce materials are available to download free of charge You can download the Microsoft® Word® file for each document and edit it as you see fit.

There are embedded instructions and placeholder text that you will need to *delete* or *adapt* before you use the Word files. Specifically:

- To help guide you in customizing the workforce materials, the Word files include **instructions that are in italics with yellow highlighting** (see example below). You will need to delete these instructions from the final materials you distribute to employees.
- **“ABC Toy Company” is used as a fictional placeholder name.** When you see the ABC Toy Company name or logo, it indicates a place to customize the workforce materials by inserting your organization’s name or logo (see example below).



ABC Toy Company Health Tip Sheets for Employees

[NOTE: delete or replace this placeholder logo and company name]

- The workforce materials also have fictional links to resources on the fictional ABC Toy Company’s employee website. These links are to other documents that are part of the workforce materials. These links are included because we found that people like having cross-references to other Toolkit workforce materials. They also like knowing that they can access all of the Toolkit workforce materials in one place. An example is shown below.

[NOTE: text that follows is a placeholder that you will need to adapt or delete]

This document is part of a series of information resources to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit your employee website employees.com/healthinfo/

- Please keep in mind that many of the links in the workforce materials are real links to real resources on government or other websites. **To help you distinguish the fictional links from the real links, the fictional links are marked with yellow italicized instructions** that tell you to adapt or delete them. An example is shown below.

[NOTE: you will need to adapt or delete the sentence that follows and the two bulleted points under the sentence. The two documents listed in the bulleted points are available to you as part of the Toolkit] Look for these tip sheets at the employee website (employees.com/healthinfo/):

- “Good quality care: what it is and why you can’t take it for granted.”
- “Information about health care quality: what it is and where to find it.”

- **If you plan to have a web-based “home” for various Toolkit workforce materials, you can replace these fictional references** to the ABC Toy Company employee website with the name of your own employee website. If you won’t have a web-based “home” for the Toolkit workforce materials, you can delete all references to the ABC Toy Company website and the links they include.

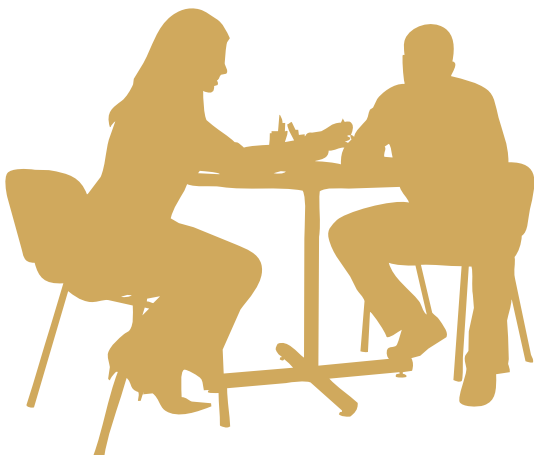
- **Some of the workforce materials have places marked for you to insert information that is tailored to your own organization.** These places have sample text that refers to the fictional ABC Toy Company. Examples are shown earlier in this document on pages 10 and 11. You can either replace these placeholder references with information about your own organization or delete them.

The workforce materials include *photographs* to personalize the documents and add visual appeal.

They are all stock photos from a low-cost stock photo company. These photographs are all watermarked with a label that says “sample photo.”

If you want to use these same photos in your own materials, it is very easy and the cost is quite low.

- The sample photos are included for illustration only. For legal reasons related to copyright and photo usage agreements, each organization that uses the sample photos must pay to use them. The cost is less than ten dollars each.
- Instructions tell how to order the photos from a low-cost stock photo company (istockphoto.com) and insert them into the Microsoft® Word® file for the workforce material. These instructions are in a separate pdf document called *How to customize the Toolkit workforce materials: Technical help with text and photos* (see *Acknowledgments and References* at the end of this document).



The workforce materials contain numerous links to selected websites. When we tested the workforce materials, we found that people like having information about additional resources.

- Many of the links are to specific resources on government sites, such as the website for the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. For a list of the links that are included in the workforce materials, you can visit the *Communication Toolkit* website and click *Links*. This website also has additional links to resources just for employers and unions.
- All website addresses (URLs) in the workforce materials are current as of March 2008. **You will want to test these links and update them as needed** before you distribute the materials.

Distributing the workforce materials

With several workforce documents available to you through the Toolkit, you have many choices. You can use any or all of them, in whole or in part, depending on which ones are most relevant for your organization and your employees’ needs. You can distribute them in any way you wish and in any order.

Depending on your employees’ needs and preferences, you can customize and share a Toolkit workforce document by sending it to employees or making it available on a website. You may want to integrate content from the workforce materials into health information materials you are already using. You may want to use excerpts from the materials as shorter pieces that you can put into emails or use in other ways; the materials with the photo-story examples would work especially well for this purpose.

The order in which you distribute the Toolkit workforce materials may influence how employees might react to them. Starting with materials that employees find especially appealing and feel most capable of using can help pave the way for distributing documents on more difficult topics, such as understanding health care costs or getting the right amount of care.

For example, documents under Topic Area 3, *Tips for getting good quality care before, during, and after a health care appointment*, and Topic Area 4, *Help in using the internet to find health information you can trust*, might be good places to start. Our testing showed that people were universally enthusiastic about the documents in these two areas.

In addition, the document called *Good quality health care: What it is and why you can't take it for granted* is a useful introduction to the general topic of health care quality. This document gives employees the foundation they need to understand subsequent Toolkit workforce materials. It is in Topic Area 1, *Understanding the basics of health care quality and the importance of evidence-based information*.

People value information that is readily available when they need it and can use it. For example, keeping the information materials about evidence-based health care on an employee website makes access very convenient. You can draw attention to what is on the website by sending periodic email alerts or distributing the materials in other ways. You can integrate the workforce materials into your ongoing communication about health care issues or tie the distribution of Toolkit workforce materials to an event such as a health fair.

You can focus the distribution of information about evidence-based health care on times of the year when employees are likely to find it more salient, such as during open enrollment and during the cold and flu season. You can avoid certain times of the year when it may be hard to get employees' attention or when they may be unreceptive, such as during the holidays and the tax season.

Reinforcing the message of evidence-based health care

For many of your employees, using evidence-based health care is likely to require thinking about their health and health care in a new way. It may mean assuming more personal responsibility. It may require developing new skills, such as becoming more assertive with health care providers and seeking health information on their own.

From our research with employees, we know that some people have concerns about these new responsibilities and behaviors—and about how their health care providers might respond. For example, some people are reluctant to speak up and ask questions about health care quality and treatment decisions when they see a doctor. Perhaps the doctor will be offended, because asking questions could seem like questioning the doctor's judgment. Such concerns and inhibitions can make it difficult for people to act on the information you offer.

You can help by working with health plans and health providers to develop shared understandings that promote and support the patient's role in evidence-based approaches. To help develop and promote consistent messages across settings, you can work with programs that offer health-related assistance to your employees, such as pharmacies and nurse help lines. You can work with other organizations, such as health departments, unions, business coalitions, advocacy groups, and community-based organizations, on ways to support and reinforce the information about evidence-based approaches you are communicating to employees.

Look for opportunities to reinforce the messages of evidence-based health care. For example, if a newspaper article reports quality comparisons of local hospitals, you can use the Toolkit workforce materials about health care quality standards and comparisons to help employees learn more.

To check on how well the workforce materials are working for your employees, ask for their feedback. You can solicit their comments by email or by using a quick web survey, or you can talk with them at lunch or during staff meetings. Find out whether they have looked at the Toolkit workforce materials and ask about their reactions. Asking for their comments and suggestions will draw their interest and help build trust. You can use their feedback to have a more productive conversation about evidence-based health care.

Acknowledgments and references

This document is part of the *Communication Toolkit: Using Information to get high quality health care*.

This Toolkit was developed to help employers, labor unions, and others frame and deliver messages to employees about the meaning and importance of evidence-based health care. This Toolkit was developed by the American Institutes for Research (Kristin Carman, PhD, Project Director) and McGee & Evers Consulting, Inc., with funding from the California HealthCare Foundation.

To access the Toolkit, visit the website of the *National Business Group on Health* (www.businessgrouphealth.org), where you will find the following Toolkit resources:

- **Workforce materials to download and adapt for use with your employees.** This collection of Microsoft Word documents is available for you to download free of charge and adapt to suit your needs. The documents have been tested with employees for comprehension and appeal. They reflect guidelines for writing and design from a forthcoming web-based *Toolkit for making written material clear and effective* written by Jeanne McGee for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).
- **Documents that provide background and suggestions** to help you communicate more effectively with your workforce about evidence-based care.

- *Using the Toolkit to explain evidence-based health care.* This document points out essential features of the workforce documents and gives tips on how to use them. A companion document, *How to customize the Toolkit workforce materials: Technical help with text and photos*, explains things to know about customizing the Microsoft Word documents and using the photos.
- *Communicating with employees about evidence-based health care: Communication challenges.* This research report summarizes findings from the research that was done to inform the development of the Toolkit. This research included focus groups and interviews with employees and others, and a national web survey of employees.

