

OPENING STATEMENT

SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY

HEARING ON IMPLEMENTING

BEST PATIENT CARE PRACTICES

FEBRUARY 5, 2009

Less than half of all medical care in the nation today is supported by adequate evidence of its effectiveness. In other words, more than half of all medical care is not supported by adequate evidence about its effectiveness.

The question that has been ignored for too long is, What are the best practices in health care? Part of the answer involves using modern health information technology – it will help to coordinate team-based care, reduce overuse utilization and duplication of procedures, and improve patient safety. Comparative effectiveness research will help identify what works and what we still need to find out. Knowledge gained from this research must also be made more widely available.

Best practices obviously include knowing the prescribed course of therapy and continued management for a given disease. They

include the policies and procedures that govern the day-to-day workings of a medical organization and how things get done.

They must also measure outcomes. In fact, we should start with outcomes, work backward to revise procedures to strengthen patient safety and satisfaction, improve efficiency and eliminate waste. We've already seen remarkable reductions in hospital acquired infections using this approach.

Another effective approach has become standard in private sector initiatives to improve quality, and has been taken up by some public sector initiatives as well. It involves changes that coordinate the subject matter of experts and quality improvement facilitators to improve the procedures and outcomes for programs and services.

Another way to make sure that the right thing gets done is to have uniform "to do" lists for various procedures. It's simple, and it's a low-tech, standard way, to achieve consistent and safe procedures.

We can't afford any longer to have hospitals and practitioners "winging it," when patient safety is at stake, and health costs continue to spin out of control.

I look forward to working with President Obama and our Senate colleagues on the HELP and Finance Committees to expand access

to the best possible care. I especially commend Senator Mikulski for her continued leadership in on quality and delivery reform, and I look forward to learning more from each of our witnesses today about implementing these best practices.