



Topic Brief: Health Management Organizations and Timely Diagnosis

Date: 5/27/20

Nomination Number: 849

Purpose: This document summarizes the information addressing a nomination submitted on 3/6/2019 through the Effective Health Care Website. This information was used to inform the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program decisions about whether to produce an evidence report on the topic, and if so, what type of evidence report would be most suitable.

Issue: The nominator is concerned that someone she knows was told that it would take two years before diagnosis of her condition. She wishes to know what the standard is for timely diagnosis, particularly by a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO).

Program Decision: The nominator's main concern cannot be addressed with an evidence review because timely diagnosis depends on a number of different factors. The EPC Program has a related ongoing systematic review on reasons for diagnostic errors in the emergency department and strategies to address them.

Background

- The concept of timely diagnosis refers to disclosure of the diagnosis at the right time for the individual with consideration of their preferences and unique circumstances.¹
- The National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine) defined diagnostic error as the failure to establish an accurate and timely explanation of the patient's health problem or communicate it to the patient. Diagnoses may be delayed, inaccurate, or missed.²
- Communicating accurate and timely diagnoses to patients is an important component of providing high-quality care.²
- Timeliness of diagnosis depends on the context. This context includes many factors including preexisting conditions in the patient, results of other tests, skill and knowledge of clinical providers, availability of therapeutic resources, and so on.³

Assessment Methods

We assessed nomination for priority for a systematic review or other AHRQ EHC report with a hierarchical process using established selection criteria. Assessment of each criteria determined the need to evaluate the next one.

1. Determine the *appropriateness* of the nominated topic for inclusion in the EHC program.
2. Establish the overall *importance* of a potential topic as representing a health or healthcare issue in the United States.
3. Determine the *desirability of new evidence review* by examining whether a new systematic review or other AHRQ product would be duplicative.

4. Assess the *potential impact* a new systematic review or other AHRQ product.
5. Assess whether the *current state of the evidence* allows for a systematic review or other AHRQ product (feasibility).
6. Determine the *potential value* of a new systematic review or other AHRQ product.

Summary of Selection Criteria Assessment

One type of diagnostic error is the failure to establish an accurate and timely explanation of the patient's health problem and is a part of providing high-quality healthcare, regardless of payment method. The time needed to for a timely and accurate diagnosis depends on many factors including the patient's condition, type of test, and availability of treatments. This issue cannot be addressed in a systematic review.

Related Resources

We found two systematic reviews related to the nominator's concern:

- An in-process AHRQ systematic review on Diagnostic Error in Emergency Departments,⁴ based on another nomination through the EHC Website. It will focus on reasons for diagnostic error and strategies for mitigating them.
- [Abimanyi-Ochom et al. Strategies to Reduce Diagnostic Errors: A Systematic Review. 2019.](#)⁵

References

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4. Topic Brief: Diagnostic Errors. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2020. <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/system/files/docs/topic-brief-diagnostic-errors.pdf>. Accessed on 22 May 2020.
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Conflict of Interest: None of the investigators have any affiliations or financial involvement that conflicts with the material presented in this report.

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