Assessing and Improving Health Confidence: A Policy Brief
A Measure in Action for Patient-Centered Care

Although access to health care is improving through health insurance reform, many patients are not receiving high quality, patient-centered care that meets their needs. Improved patient outcomes have been shown to be associated with a “productive interaction” between patient and health care provider, in which the provider uses culturally competent approaches to engage the patient in shared health decision-making. Conversely, patients who are not engaged are less likely to adopt health-protective behaviors, resulting in worse health outcomes and the need for more intensive and expensive care. By using a tool that assesses quality of care through a measure of patient engagement, health care institutions and community groups can address inadequacies and disparities in patient-centered care, leading to better health outcomes for patients.

This Brief describes

- What health confidence measures;
- A web-based tool for assessing and addressing health confidence (HowsYourHealth.org); and
- A new, consumer-focused campaign in Massachusetts to engage community-based organizations around health confidence.

What is Health Confidence?

Health confidence measures patients’ level of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy about taking an active role in their health care and managing their health conditions. Patient-reported health confidence is a simple measure for the associated validated concepts of: patient self-care, patient self-management, patient activation, self-efficacy, productive patient-provider interaction, and patient engagement.2

While it may appear difficult to measure, health confidence can assessed through a simple question: “How confident are you that you can manage and control most of your health problems?” To assess the quality of the health care interaction and the degree to which it is patient-centered, patients are asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “I receive exactly the care I want and need exactly when I want and need it.”
**WHY DOES HEALTH CONFIDENCE MATTER?**

Interventions that improve patient-centered care and help patients become more educated and engaged in their health care have been associated with improved health outcomes\(^3\) and patient experience\(^4\) in addition to reduced costs\(^5,6\) associated with adverse care.\(^7\) Helping patients become more health confident is a simple and strategic approach to move towards these results.

1. **Patients who are more health confident have better health behaviors and outcomes.**

A growing body of research shows that engaged, activated, health confident patients are significantly more likely to engage in preventive and healthy behavior and have better health outcomes.\(^8\)

- Less activated patients are three times as likely to have unmet medical needs and twice as likely to delay medical care.
- Highly activated patients are two or more times as likely to prepare questions for a visit to the doctor, to know about treatment guidelines for their condition, and to seek out health information.
- Chronically ill patients with higher activation and health confidence levels are more likely than those with lower levels to adhere to treatment, perform regular self-monitoring at home, and obtain regular chronic care.

In addition to the observed linkages with healthy behavior, patient activation and health confidence have been shown to be associated with better clinical outcomes, such as biometrics that include body mass index, hemoglobin A1c, blood pressure, and cholesterol in the normal range.\(^9,10\)

2. **Patients who are more health confident report better health care experiences.**

Several studies have documented that more health confident patients consistently report more positive care experiences, such as higher-quality interpersonal exchanges with physicians, greater fairness, and more out-of-office contact with physicians, as well as fewer problems with care coordination for patients with chronic diseases. When seeing the same physician, patients at higher levels of activation had more positive experiences than patients at lower levels,\(^11\) suggesting that engaged, health confident patients may have the skills and confidence to elicit what they need from their providers.
3. Patients who are more health confident have lower health care costs.

While cost data is more limited, a recent longitudinal study that specifically examined patient activation and cost of care found that patients engaged in their care cost significantly less than comparable patients who were not engaged.12 Several studies have reported that after disease severity and demographic characteristics were controlled for, highly activated patients had lower rates of costly use such as hospitalizations and emergency department visits, compared to less activated patients.13 When less than two-thirds of patients feel prepared to manage their health problems at discharge14, improving patient health confidence is critical to prevent costly readmissions.

**The Imperative to Improve Health Confidence**

Health confidence, as an evidence-based measure for engagement, can be improved at an individual level using a free set of tools, called “How’s Your Health?” (HYH). Developed and offered by Dartmouth Medical School, HYH both measures health confidence and provides mechanisms for improving it. Health care providers, community groups, family caregivers, and patients themselves can use HYH to measure and improve health confidence in the clinic or within the community, leading to improved health outcomes and reduced waste.

1. Clinic-based approach

How’s Your Health has been successfully implemented to improve quality of care in hundreds of clinical practices nationwide15. Health care providers follow the health confidence measurement with an intervention of motivational interviewing and provision of needed education and other resources identified by the patient. By systematically assessing patient feedback as part of a purposeful quality improvement strategy, providers and practices have made significant improvements in policies and procedures.

**Clinic Approach: “How’s Your Health BC?”**

The Government of British Columbia has adapted the HYH tools for use in its clinical Practice Support Program, designed to improve clinical and practice management and to support enhanced delivery of patient care.

http://howsyourhealthbc.ca
2. Community engagement approach

Community groups and other health advocates outside of care providers have successfully implemented HYH in community engagement efforts. The HYH online tool provides a mechanism for community members to access tailored health education materials outside of a clinic setting, as well as a bank of data about community health and needs. Lessons learned from these initiatives include illuminating health disparities in the community, such as the impact of illness burden and poverty levels on health confidence.

THE 2014 MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH CONFIDENCE PILOT CAMPAIGN

Given the clear benefits of improving patient health confidence, Health Care for All is developing a community-based approach to implementing How’s Your Health in Massachusetts. The time is ripe for such an effort, as approximately 98% of Massachusetts residents have health insurance, but quality of care and patient health outcomes are still of concern. Data from the How’s Your Health online tool show that, at present, less than 50% of Massachusetts residents report that they are health confident. Even more concerning is that figure drops to 25% of low-income residents. Only about 30% of Massachusetts residents report that they have adequate access to health care that meets their needs.

Beginning in summer 2014, HCFA will be working with three local community coalitions to implement the Pilot campaign, with a focus on:

- better understanding the health concerns of particular groups in the community
- improving delivery of health services in the community
- developing and implementing a “community action plan” to address deficits in patient confidence

HCFA sees this work as being groundbreaking and taking place over three or more years before it is well-established. The goal of the campaign is for 30% of Massachusetts residents to be using the “How’s Your Health” tools within three years of launch date.

Community Approach:
Long Beach, CA
The Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce implemented the web-based HYH survey in partnership with local health care organizations, city leaders, and major employers to obtain actionable information about population health needs and health care quality.

17 HYH data, 2014; n=1700