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**U.S. Health Care Providers Say Quality of Care is
'Unacceptable'**

*Multi-million dollar initiative launched to help providers and administrators
pursue health care perfection*

WASHINGTON, May 8, 2001 Health care providers and administrators believe the quality of health care in America needs to be dramatically improved, according to survey results released today by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The nationwide survey of more than one thousand health care professionals shows that more than half (58 percent) of providers and administrators think health care in this country is not very good, with as many as 95 percent of physicians reporting that they have witnessed a "serious" medical error. The need for change is apparent to health care providers who were surveyed, with 4 of 5 stating they believe fundamental changes are needed in the American health care system.

The results of the survey were announced during a news conference today formally launching a new \$20.9 million initiative. The program, Pursuing Perfection: Raising the Bar for Health Care Performance, is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and managed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. The goal of Pursuing Perfection is to help hospital and physician organizations dramatically improve the quality of health care by pursuing perfection in all of their major health care processes.

"Compared with other industries, the expectation for health care quality is very low," Lewis G. Sandy, MD, executive vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, told reporters attending the National Press Club news conference. "We have intentionally set the bar high for this initiative. Pursuing Perfection may sound idealistic, but we believe it is possible to make dramatic and momentous improvements on a system-wide basis."

"We have adopted a working definition of pursuing perfection," Sandy said. He said it means striving to:

- deliver services accurately and correctly and at the right time;
- avoid services that are not helpful or cost-effective;
- prevent safety hazards and errors; and
- respect each patient's unique needs and preferences.

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Despite survey results that indicate low marks from health providers and administrators, Donald M. Berwick, MD, MPP, president and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, said he is very encouraged that a significant number of providers (29 percent) believe they personally can be leaders in improving the system.

“This is the most exciting project in the 10-year history of the IHI,” said Berwick. “Our aim is to help a small number of deeply committed health care organizations.”

“We are very optimistic that the initiative participants will provide us with surprising and indeed thrilling examples of improvement, not generally thought possible in the world of health care,” Berwick told reporters. “While the bad news is that errors are common and quality is doubted, the good news is that there is a strong cadre of providers out there who believe we can raise the bar for health care performance.”

More than 220 physician and hospital organizations nationwide submitted grant applications outlining plans to pursue perfection in health care across their organizations. Under the first phase of the program, up to 12 applicants will receive a seven-month, \$50,000 planning grant to develop a detailed business plan on how they will implement their proposed improvements. This winter, six of the 12 finalists will be selected to receive grants between \$1.5 million and \$3 million to support their work to improve the quality of health care.

Berwick said the initiative will provide intellectual resources and leadership to help bridge the gap between “what we know and what we do.” He said a key component of the Pursuing Perfection program is a learning network on pursuing perfect health care. The network will rely primarily on virtual technologies to help providers share information, strategies, innovations, and results. All Pursuing Perfection applicants, regardless of whether or not they are selected for grants, will have access to the learning network.

“The automobile industry realized what was possible in product service quality when Toyota set entirely new benchmarks, beginning in the 1970s,” Berwick said. “In a similar way, this initiative presents a wonderful opportunity for the health care community to see what is possible.” In addition to working to convince providers and administrators that it is possible to improve the quality of health care, Berwick said the initiative also will reach out to opinion leaders, including health care purchasers.

Wirthlin Worldwide conducted the nationwide survey of more than one thousand physicians, nurses and senior level hospital executives, including CEOs, presidents and Chairmen. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation commissioned the survey to gain a better understanding of how health care providers and executives view the issue of quality in the health care setting. The survey was fielded between March 21 and April 11, 2001.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation was established as a national philanthropy in 1972 and today it is the largest U.S. foundation devoted to improving the health and health care of all Americans. The Foundation concentrates its grantmaking in three areas: assuring that all Americans have access to basic health care at reasonable cost, improving care and support for people with chronic health conditions, and promoting health and preventing disease by reducing the harm caused by substance abuse — tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs.

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement is an integrative force for improving health care worldwide. By building bridges for people and organizations that are committed to real change, and by harvesting innovative ideas, IHI leverages the collective energy of health care organizations to accomplish more together than they can separately. Founded in 1991, the Institute is an independent, non-profit organization based in Boston.
