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NEWS RELEASE

HRET Launches New Toolkit for Collecting Race, Ethnicity and Primary Language Information from Patients

Chicago (February 15, 2005) The Health Research and Educational Trust (HRET) has just released a new Web-based toolkit for collection of race, ethnicity and primary language information by hospitals and other health care providers. The tool kit can be accessed by going to www.hretdisparities.org/.

With the recent announcement by the Department of Health and Human Services that the federal government will implement a national electronic medical record system in 10 years and with 22 states mandating the collection of race and ethnicity data, the need for standardization has become increasingly urgent. This groundbreaking toolkit has been developed with the support of the Commonwealth Fund to help hospitals collect accurate information from patients to meet regulatory and local community demands. The data can be used for monitoring health care delivery and quality of care by linking to clinical measures and targeting appropriate interventions to specific groups.

“If we are to adequately address disparities in the delivery, quality and outcomes of care provided to different segments of our population, we must have clear, concise data on patient race, ethnicity and preferred language,” said Mary A. Pittman, president of HRET. “Framing how to best collect this information and cross-reference it with clinical data is the only way we are going to make any real headway achieving greater equity in the care we deliver.”

According to the principal investigator, Romana Hasnain-Wynia, HRET’s research shows that the effective collection of good quality race/ethnicity and language data is possible, and a standardized approach will improve data collection efficiencies and reduce current redundancies and inconsistencies. With training, hospital personnel can gather the information in a cost-effective, efficient and respectful manner.

“There are a number of fundamental steps that hospitals can follow to ensure that their data collection methodologies provide consistent, reliable and accurate data,” Hasnain-Wynia added. “Who gathers the information, when and how is key.”

Based on HRET’s research findings, there are several steps hospitals can take to ensure accurate collection of these data.

- Standardize who provides information – patients or caretakers are more likely to provide accurate information than hospital staff;
- Establish a protocol for collecting information upon admission or patient registration;
- Standardize racial or ethnic categories;
- Ensure that data storage is compatible across hospitals, communities and health systems (the federal Office of Management and Budget categories have been found to be most useful);
- Keep information in a standard format that can be merged with clinical data files, and;
- Address patient concerns with how data collected is gathered and will be used before collecting any information.

Tracking the racial and ethnic composition and changing health care needs of different populations is vital. The toolkit can serve as a resource for hospitals and health care organizations as they systematically measure, report and benchmark process and outcome measures by race and ethnicity. These measurements will serve as a critical first step in addressing health disparities and improving quality of care for everyone. The toolkit can be accessed online at www.hretdisparities.org/.

About the Commonwealth Fund

The Commonwealth Fund is a private foundation that supports independent research on health and social issues and makes grants to improve health care practice and policy. The Fund is dedicated to helping people become more informed about their health care, and improving care for vulnerable populations such as children, elderly people, low-income families, minority Americans, and the uninsured.

About HRET

Founded in 1944, the Health Research and Educational Trust (HRET) is a private, not-for-profit organization involved in research, education and demonstration programs addressing health management and policy issues. HRET, an American Hospital Association affiliate, collaborates with health care, government, academic, business and community organizations across the United States to conduct research and disseminate findings that shape the future of health care. For more information about HRET, visit www.hretdisparities.org/.