2006 Ernest Amory Codman Award Recipient

Individual Award

Dennis S. O'Leary, M.D., Former President, The Joint Commission

The Joint Commission recognized Dennis S. O'Leary, M.D., for his leadership role in using performance measures to improve health care quality and safety by naming him the honorary recipient of the 2006 Ernest Amory Codman Award for individuals. Dr. O'Leary has continued Ernest Codman's mission by demonstrating the importance of care-related outcomes and process measurement to tens of thousands of health care organizations in the United States, and encouraging them to embrace the concept of public reporting of care results. When Dr. O'Leary arrived at the Joint Commission in 1986, it was his vision that health care organizations not only do the right thing through standards compliance, but that they measure their performance as well.

During Dr. O'Leary's tenure as the Joint Commission's president, his commitment to continuous performance improvement was evident when the Joint Commission revolutionized the accreditation process with the creation of the "Agenda for Change" in 1987, and introduced further dramatic refinements with the implementation of "Shared Visions-New Pathways" in 2004. The Agenda for Change included the development and testing of six sets of performance measures in order to establish a national database of standardized hospital performance measures that could be used to assess and improve the quality of care. The Agenda for Change served as the basis for the Joint Commission's ORYX performance measurement program, initiated in 1995. In 1998, accredited organizations began collecting measurement data as a requirement of accreditation.

In 2000, under Dr. O'Leary's leadership, the Joint Commission developed a process for the identification, testing, specification, and implementation of a common set of measures for use in hospitals. In 2002, hospitals began collecting these "core" measure data for purposes of accreditation. To date, largely due to the Joint Commission's efforts under Dr. O'Leary's guidance, five core performance measure sets are commonly used by hospitals nationally. In 2005, the Joint Commission began publicly reporting hospital performance on core measures on its Quality Check website. In 2007, The Joint Commission issued its first report on "Improving America's Hospitals: A Report on Quality and Safety." Issued annually, this report presents reliable information on how America’s accredited hospitals perform against evidence-based measures relating to the care of heart attack, heart failure, pneumonia and surgical patients.

Today, ORYX core measures are used in many venues, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Hospital Compare website. Hospitals in other countries seek to benchmark themselves against the ORYX core measures. Moreover, the health care industry is now focused on establishing the common infrastructure for data aggregation and measure reporting that Dr. O'Leary foresaw in 1986 as part of the Agenda for Change.