

The James A Vohs Award for Quality— The Fifth Annual *Permanente Journal* Special Issue



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We all know that change for its own sake is seldom wise. The medical pioneers who founded the Kaiser Permanente (KP) organization effected a revolutionary change in the established system of delivery of medical care. Their success and the fact that the KP system continues to thrive is a tribute to the value of incessant examination of our methods. This philosophy has always been clear to our leaders and to most health practitioners in the KP organization. Improvements serve both to increase the quality of care to our patients and to ensure survival of our organization in the competitive health care marketplace.

James A Vohs, MD, President, CEO, and Chairman of the Boards of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc, and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, was a creative champion of innovation and improvement in Permanente Medicine. Upon his retirement, the James A Vohs Award for Quality was established to recognize and honor projects that advance the quality of care, showcase innovative techniques, produce transferable knowledge, and underscore the value of multidisciplinary teamwork. Annually, each KP Division is invited to nominate one or two projects. The award is presented for the project best representing an established effort to improve

quality through objectively documented and institutionalized changes in direct patient care. The selection criteria include demonstration of measurable improvement in care and potential for transfer to other locations as a “successful practice.” Thus, the benefits ultimately extend to large numbers of KP members nationally, to the general community, and to the entire health care industry.

We present in this issue the 2003 Vohs award winners. The KP Single-Region award was given to “The Palliative Care Program—Southern California.” This interdisciplinary, home-based program offers care for patients with an estimated 12-month prognosis for survival; the three most common diagnoses being cancer, heart failure, and lung disease. The program demonstrated effectiveness in improving symptom management, offering psychosocial support, and reducing costs. The KP Multiple-Region winner was “Improving Appropriate Prescription Drug Use

to Best Practice—Northern and Southern California.” Targeting antibiotics, allergy drugs, and arthritis medications, the program established committees to monitor their use and to engage in instructional educational approaches to encourage appropriate prescribing.

Publication of the Vohs winners fits the mission of *The Permanente Journal* “to promote the delivery of superior health care through the principles and benefits of Permanente Medicine.” With this issue, we have published 15 Vohs projects over a five-year period. They represent eight different KP Regions and most major medical specialties, including: 1) preventive practices (pediatric practice, immunizations, breast cancer), 2) management of chronic illness (asthma, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, COPD, sickle cell disease), 3) computerization of medical data, and 4) drug utilization. A number of Vohs projects have already rapidly spread to use by other regions.

The process for nomination has some local variation and each KP Division has contact liaisons easily located through its regional quality representative. Nominations need approval by the KP Division President and by the Medical Director. Applications are due September 1st each year. There is no monetary gift with the James A Vohs Quality Improvement Award. Winners and runners-up present their projects at a reception hosted by the KP Boards of Directors, Division Presidents, and other Program Officers. The awardees also receive publicity through the Quality Notes newsletter and through local, state, and national press releases.

A Vohs Award Selection Committee includes Board of Directors members, a Vohs family member, Chairman Bob Crane, Program Office quality representatives, a Permanente Federation representative, and two nonvoting Program Office quality representatives. This Committee announces its selection at the December Board of Directors meeting, and team members are contacted by phone within the next day or two. The recognition ceremony takes place at the March Board of Directors’ meeting.

The possibilities for projects are limited only by the imaginations of our health professionals. Part of our purpose in publishing these projects is the hope that they will encourage others to present projects for consideration. ♦

“There is nothing permanent, except change.”

— Heraclitus, c 540-480 BC,
Greek philosopher

“Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better.”

— Richard Hooker, 1554-1600,
British theologian