

The James A. Vohs Award for Quality

(The first annual Permanente Journal special issue)

Introduction and History

Our commitment to improving the health of our members is a driving force in the Kaiser Permanente (KP) dedication to quality improvement. With our integrated health system and defined population of members, we are in a unique position to continually explore opportunities to refine the care we provide. By focusing on new or improved ways to deploy the right care at the right time, we enhance the health of our membership, build upon our existing reputation as a provider of quality health care, and improve service and cost-effectiveness of care for our members and group customers.

During his 17 years as President, CEO, and Chairman of the Boards of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc, and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, James A. Vohs continually emphasized the moral and strategic importance of quality and quality improvement. On the event of his retirement as Chairman of the Boards, the James A. Vohs Award for Quality was established by the Boards to recognize and honor projects that advance the quality of care, showcase innovative techniques and knowledge that can be transferred throughout the Program, and underscore the value of multidisciplinary teamwork.

The Vohs Award recognizes exceptional KP efforts to address quality of care issues and acknowledges multidisciplinary team efforts representing Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc, Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, and the Permanente Medical Groups. The criteria for selecting a winner assures that the project measurably improves patient care and has the potential for transfer as a "successful practice," thereby benefiting many members across the Program. The Vohs Award is designed to encourage projects that demonstrate leadership within KP

and the health care industry, and that develop and apply new approaches to improve quality of care.

Annually, each KP Division and KP alliance (ie, Group Health) is invited to nominate one or two projects for consideration for the James A. Vohs Award for Quality. The award is presented for the project that best represents a well-established effort to significantly improve quality through substantial, objectively documented, and institutionalized changes in direct patient care, either through new programs or significant improvements in existing ones.

We present here the 1999 recipients of the Vohs award: winner, the KPNW Comprehensive Computer-Based Patient Record, and honorable mention was awarded to: the Rocky Mountain Clinical Pharmacy Anticoagulation Service; and the Southeast's North Carolina Diabetes Preventive Care Program. In addition to presenting the basic elements of each program, we hope to introduce the reader to the Vohs Award application process to stimulate similar project development on diverse topics throughout our organization.

As emphasized by physician-champion, Sam Weir, MD, who led and supported the 1999 Vohs Award Application from the North Carolina Diabetes Prevention Care Program reported here, multidisciplinary involvement and strong team leadership was critical in the success of the project. Just as the quality planning process and methods for making the program operational served as the frame for several other successful program rollouts within its Local Markets, all three programs described should serve as a model for quality improvement programs throughout Kaiser Permanente nationally.

Incentive is provided to all PMGs and KP professional staff to apply for the James A. Vohs Award for

Quality. There is no monetary gift with this award. The winning Division receives an engraved plaque, and project team members receive other award gifts. The "real" award is recognition for good work. Winners and runners-up are invited to present their projects at a reception hosted by the KFHP/KFH Boards of Directors, Division Presidents, Federation Medical Directors, and other Program Officers. The awardees also receive publicity through the Quality Notes and KP-Stat newsletters and through national and media press releases.

The local level process for nomination varies. Each Division has contact liaisons, who can be located by contacting the regional Quality Director. Each Division also has a screening and review process for potential nominees. Nominations are signed off by the Division President and Federation Medical Director. Nominations and applications are due to Program Offices September 1st each year.

A Vohs Award Selection Committee consists of two Boards of Directors members, a Vohs family member, Chairman Bob Crane, one Permanente Federation representative, and two non-voting Program Office quality representatives who serve as staff to the committee. This Committee announces its selection at the Boards of Directors meeting in December. The Division President, Federation Medical Directors, and project team leaders are notified by phone after the meeting. The recognition ceremony takes place at the March Boards of Directors meeting.

We thus hope that the following three entries for the previous James A. Vohs Award will serve as models to motivate all KP Divisions and Permanente Medical Groups to present projects for consideration. ❖

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