

**KANSAS HEALTH POLICY AUTHORITY  
LEGISLATIVE COORDINATING COUNCIL STUDY #18  
Kansas Health Transparency**

### **What is Health Transparency?**

Health transparency is aimed at empowering individuals with greater access and ability to use information on cost and quality in order to make wise, informed decisions about the various health care services available. Consumers must have the information needed to answer questions such as: Which hospital has better outcomes from, performs the greatest number of, and has the lowest readmission rates following a specific surgery? How much is a specific surgery at one hospital, as compared with another? If one surgery or facility is more expensive than another, are the quality differences important and do they potentially offset the price variances? Additionally, what are the success rates of alternative surgeries/procedures? (US Chamber of Commerce). Such transparency will enable them to take more personal responsibility on how they spend their health care dollars. In addition to making more information available to consumers, increasing health transparency implicitly requires health literacy efforts to improve the ability of individuals to interpret, understand and apply health data to become better health care purchasers.

### **Kansas Health Online (KHO)**

The Kansas health transparency initiative is a web portal called Kansas Health Online. It can be found at the URL [www.kansashealthonline.com](http://www.kansashealthonline.com) and provides consumer-focused information that:

- Promotes personal responsibility by promoting healthy lifestyles and preventive health interventions
- Promotes health literacy
- Offers a one-stop health resource for Kansans

### **KHO Website Content**

- Diagnostic tools to help identify medical conditions and likely causes, starting with symptoms, e.g. WebMD Symptom Analyzer
- Disease management information, e.g. National Library of Medicine
- Medical dictionaries, glossaries and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Links to local resources (Hospital, physician, and other health resource directory by specialty and zip code)
- Comparative metrics about:
  - Hospitals: JCAHO Core Measures – QualityCheck.org; CMS Hospital Quality Initiative (<http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov>); AHRQ; NQF
  - Physicians: CMS Physician Quality Initiative
  - Insurers: HEDIS (incl. clinical and CAHPS surveys)
- Links to other nationally recognized websites: WebMD, Health.gov, ConsumerHealthRatings.com (Links to 300 organizations that rate hospitals/physicians/nursing homes/ home health agencies); CMS Website; Medicare.gov - Prescription Drug Plan Finder, etc.

- Modeled after other successful state websites, e.g. CHCF.org (California's Market and Policy Monitor for health transparency) ; FloridaCompareCare.gov
- Guidance from listening tours, Consumer Advisory Council for Kansas-specific consumer health issues

**KHO - Progress in 2009**

KansasHealthOnline.com, launched on January 15, 2008, by the KHPA in collaboration with the Kansas State Library and the Kansas University Dykes Medical Library, provides quality health information for consumers and empowers Kansans to make more informed decisions by providing information on health and health care in an easy to use and easy to understand format. Consumers are presented with tools, links, and information to compare hospitals, find doctors, compare health plans, analyze symptoms, get the latest information on medical conditions, make healthy lifestyle choices, and learn more about health policy.

Public libraries and the Internet are often the first place consumers turn for medical information. Research has indicated consumers who use the library as a health resource bring new information to their healthcare providers, make lifestyle changes, ask additional questions, and reduce their anxiety levels. In focus groups conducted by the Reference Point Foundation, consumers report that health information found through libraries is valuable and affects their health care decisions. In fact, 60 percent of the participants in the Reference Point Foundation project said that libraries were among their preferred sources of health information.

In addition to conducting workshops with librarians, Kansas Health Online conducted consumer focus groups across the state to learn about the health concerns and health information needs of Kansans (See Table 1).

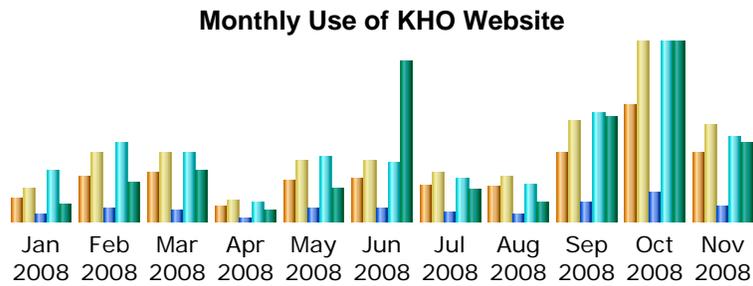
Table 1: Kansas Health Online Consumer Focus Group and Informational Workshop Schedule – 2008

Consumer Focus Groups				Workshops – Health Information using Kansas Health Online	
Coffeyville	7/16/2008	Dodge City	9/18/2008	Iola KHO Day	7/16/2008 10:00 AM
Pittsburg	7/16/2008	Manhattan	9/24/2008	Leavenworth KHO Day	8/18/2008 11:00 AM
Lawrence	8/18/2008	Belleville	9/24/2008	Norton KHO Day	9/17/2008 10:00 AM
Russell	9/16/2008	Council Grove	9/25/2008	Stockton KHO Day	9/17/2008 2:00 PM
Quinter	9/17/2008	Topeka	10/7/2008	Garden City KHO Day	9/18/2008 10:00 AM
Goodland	9/17/2008	Wichita	11/5/2008	Dodge City KHO Day	9/19/2008 1:00 PM
Ulysses	9/18/2008	Kansas City	TBA	<i>Manhattan KHO Day</i>	<i>9/24/2008 10:30 AM</i>
		Overland Park	TBA	Emporia KHO Day	9/25/2008 12:00 PM
				Wichita KHO Day	11/5/2008 12:00 AM
				Clearwater KHO Day	11/6/2008 12:00 AM

**KHO - Tracking of Monthly Usage Statistics**

Figure 1 shows the number of unique visitors, number of visits and other information about monthly use of the website.

Figure 1



Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2008	385	554	3789	24770	10.58 KB
Feb 2008	743	1123	6320	38531	23.77 KB
Mar 2008	792	1148	5543	33236	30.28 KB
Apr 2008	242	335	1473	9405	6.08 KB
May 2008	689	1004	6498	31662	20.00 KB
Jun 2008	721	1002	6442	28722	96.34 KB
Jul 2008	578	810	3870	20361	18.12 KB
Aug 2008	560	741	3150	18141	10.76 KB
Sep 2008	1136	1651	9232	52409	63.09 KB
Oct 2008	1941	2961	13878	86741	107.20 KB
Nov 2008	1135	1588	7533	41437	47.01 KB

To gain an understanding of what specific topic areas are of interest to users of this website, the number of views for individual pages of the site was also tracked. Table 2 illustrates the cumulative views in decreasing order of frequency are as follows for the period 1/15/08 to 11/30/08:

Table 2

Section of the KHO Website	Number of views
Buying health care (Comparing hospitals, nursing homes, health plans, finding physicians)	3529
Learn about your medical condition	1660
Staying healthy (Prevention)	1565
Guide to Kansas Health Policy (Information to engage consumers more in the health policy process)	1365
Navigating the Health Care System	1350
Fun health websites for kids	1289
Health literacy (How information can work for you)	1028
Health Information on the Internet	522

### Health Transparency Initiatives in Other States

The National Conference of State Legislatures compiled a comprehensive summary of health transparency in various states (*Report: State Legislation Relating to Transparency and Disclosure of Health and Hospital Charges*, December 2008). Excerpts from this summary are provided below as a comparison to the Kansas initiative:

- Cost information for Arizona hospitals and nursing home facilities can be found on the Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health Services web page.
- California currently posts hospital cost comparisons on its state government website and on the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development Healthcare Quality and Analysis Division web page for prices of all services, goods and procedures for California hospitals.
- Florida has established a Web site that enables consumers to obtain data on hospitals' charges and readmission rates.  
(<http://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/CompareCare/SelectChoice.aspx>).
- The Iowa Hospital Association has a Web site that provides information on every charge for any type of inpatient procedure in all Iowa hospitals. Iowa Hospital PricePoint is also the access point for aggregate discount information for private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid, allowing users to compare charges to revenue for hospital services.
- Louisiana has a voluntary reporting program called, "Louisiana Hospital Inform" that is maintained by the Louisiana Hospital Association. The website provides pricing data on the most common Medicare inpatient and outpatient services, as well as quality data, demographic information and services offered at Louisiana hospitals.
- The Maryland Health Care Commission provides consumers with an online hospital pricing guide that lists, for each acute care hospital in Maryland, the number of cases, the average charge per case, and the average charge per day for the 15 most common diagnoses.
- Massachusetts, as part of its new health care reform law, will establish a website that allows consumers to compare the quality of hospitals and clinics, as well as the average payment each charges for a range of services. Massachusetts already has a website, but the new site will have much more information, including prices for hospitals and for the cost of prescriptions at individual pharmacies.
- New Hampshire recently unveiled a hospital price website called "New Hampshire PricePoint," which is sponsored and maintained by the New Hampshire Hospital Association. There is also a voluntary effort in Oregon called "Oregon Pricepoint," which is sponsored and maintained by the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems. These sites allow health care consumers to receive basic, facility-specific information about services and charges.
- New Jersey -Two recent Web sites have been launched recently to help consumers make informed choices regarding price and quality of hospital services in New Jersey. The site [www.njhospitalpricecompare.com](http://www.njhospitalpricecompare.com) includes a Top 25 DRG Search; a separate site, [www.njhospitalcarecompare.com](http://www.njhospitalcarecompare.com) covers quality of care.
- The Utah Public Employee Health Plans (PEHP) has published an online Treatment Cost Estimator Home and a separate PEHP Average Costs list for infant deliveries, effective 2008.
- In Wisconsin, information on hospital charges for common procedures is available online; basic price information is available on a web site run by the Wisconsin Hospital Association that draws on data collected by the state. Price Point, displays typical charges and lengths of stay for individual hospitals, alongside state and county averages.

## **Conclusion**

The Kansas Health Online is a first step towards health transparency in Kansas comparable to ongoing efforts in other states. The predominantly “portal approach” (compilation of authoritative information already available in a centralized, easy-to-use manner) has already

shown promise as shown by the increasing usage rates in the first year after its launch. However, further work is needed in leveraging the various data sources maintained by key health agencies and organizations in the State to generating cost and quality information. The work of the Data Consortium, a multi-stakeholder, advisory committee to the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board comprising over 22 key health organizations is anticipated to help in augmenting the KHO web-site through the reporting of some health indicators in the areas of access to care, affordability and sustainability, quality and efficiency, and health and wellness that are of interest to consumers in 2009 and beyond.

Public reporting and dissemination of price and quality data is just the first step in health transparency. Incentives must also be aligned to reward quality and a culture of outcomes-focused behavior needs to be created amongst all the key players in the health care field. As summarized by the US Chamber of Commerce, coordination among the concepts of quality improvement and reporting, the establishment and dissemination of evidence based medicine protocols, widespread adoption and use of health information technology, and pay for performance are all key ingredients to creating and promoting transparency.

## APPENDIX: LIST OF OTHER TRANSPARENCY WEBSITES

The Oklahoma Hospital Association has created the site, <http://www.okhospitalpricing.org/> , a one-stop shopping place for pricing of procedures. Patients who are faced with inpatient surgeries can shop around for various prices that are charged by hospitals and get a better idea of what to expect.

<http://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/> (Both quality and pricing info -- targeted at two audiences: consumers and professionals/researchers)

<http://www.calhospitalfinance.net/> (Financial ratios and market indicators such as profitability, revenues, operating margins incl. DSH, etc. for hospitals -- aimed at a more business-savvy audience such as policy-makers/market regulators)

JCAHO Core Measures – [www.QualityCheck.org](http://www.QualityCheck.org)

Hospital Quality Initiative – [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)

Information on transparency for the Office of the President  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060822.html>

HHS website on value driven purchasing <http://www.hhs.gov/valuedriven/>

About Health Transparency  
<http://www.abouthealthtransparency.org/>