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## **New Research Shows That Community Health Centers Meet and Exceed National Performance Standards**

**WASHINGTON**—Community health centers not only can adopt national performance standards, but also can perform at a level above national quality benchmarks, according to a recent study by researchers from The George Washington University Medical Center, published in the *Journal of Ambulatory Care Management*. Historically, health centers have not participated in national reporting systems that are transparent and standardized. This has prevented them from receiving recognition for the high quality of care they furnish to medically underserved patients. The study, funded by United Health Foundation, focused on three community health centers in New York, Miami, and Washington, DC, all of which primarily serve medically underserved populations, and revealed that the centers perform at a level that is equal to or above the national average. United Health Foundation also provides grants to these health centers and others in its effort to expand and improve health care access and quality.

George Washington University Medical Center researchers conducted the analysis of performance under a quality improvement program that used standard quality benchmarks selected to reflect the health risks of the patient populations served. With appropriate support and technical assistance, the health centers were able to readily adopt and report their performance using national standards. Furthermore, their reporting showed significant improvements in the quality of care, to levels exceeding national performance benchmarks for ambulatory care, generally. These findings underscore that health centers are not simply high-quality providers for medically underserved populations, but valuable sources of health care for any patient group.

“This evaluation not only demonstrates the effective role health centers play in addressing the health care needs of the nation’s most vulnerable populations, but also their consistent ability to improve on the high quality of care that they already provide,” said Peter Shin, PhD, MPH, associate research professor, Department of Health Policy, The George Washington University Medical Center.

Reed Tuckson, M.D., Member of the Board, United Health Foundation said, "This important study shows that community health centers are willing and able to be held accountable for assessment of their clinical performance based upon national standards. It also indicates community health centers can and do provide vital, high quality health care that meets – and often exceeds – national benchmarks, despite the special challenges these clinics face. The

United Health Foundation is pleased to continue its support for community health centers as part of our mission to expand access to quality health care services that enhance the well being of communities."

As a condition of grants awarded by the United Health Foundation, the health centers were required to report under a quality performance system that enables health care purchasers, policy makers and patients to view and compare quality. The three health centers adopted a series of measures from the Ambulatory Care Quality Alliance, an organization of health care stakeholder leaders, health advocacy organizations, medical societies and health benefits purchasers. Additionally, patient satisfaction surveys, modeled after the national Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) survey, were conducted to assess patient satisfaction.

The reports generated by health centers measured preventive care, including screening for cervical cancer and tobacco use; the quality of care furnished to persons with diabetes and asthma; the frequency of prenatal care HIV screening; and patient satisfaction levels. In all categories, the health centers' performance met or exceeded the national average in relation to expected performance.

The authors of the study conclude that, as Medicaid, Medicare and the private health insurance industry move toward the widespread use of performance-based purchasing, health centers' ability to demonstrate quality may be critical. The evidence of solid performance demonstrated by research such as that presented in this study can be expected to enable health centers to more decisively make this transformation into performance purchasing.

**About the George Washington University Medical Center:**

The George Washington University Medical Center is an internationally recognized interdisciplinary academic health center that has consistently provided high-quality medical care in the Washington, DC metropolitan area for 176 years. The Medical Center comprises the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, the 11<sup>th</sup> oldest medical school in the country; the School of Public Health and Health Services, the only such school in the nation's capital; GW Hospital, jointly owned and operated by a partnership between The George Washington University and a subsidiary of Universal Health Services Inc.; and the GW Medical Faculty Associates, an independent faculty practice plan. For more information on GWUMC, visit [www.gwumc.edu](http://www.gwumc.edu).