

**Research Triangle Area Health Care Collaborative Launches *Bridges to Excellence*®
Initiative to Improve Quality and Lower Costs
*Physician Practices Encouraged to Apply for Incentive Program***

Raleigh, NC – Beginning in 2008, physicians in and around the Research Triangle Area (RTA) who provide top-quality care will receive compensation for quality thanks to the RTA Health Care Collaborative, a group of forward-thinking local employers, health plans, physicians, and others. The Collaborative is implementing an initiative known as the Bridges to Excellence (BTE) program—a nationally-recognized effort developed by employers, physicians, health care services, researchers, and other industry experts—that provides compensation to physicians for meeting rigorous quality standards for key aspects of care.

RTA Health Care Collaborative members—Cisco, IBM, GlaxoSmithKline, Duke Energy, and Belk—believe that encouraging higher quality care will result in better patient outcomes in a cost-effective manner. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, CIGNA HealthCare, and United Healthcare are also participating in the Collaborative. The North Carolina Medical Society also participated in the development of the program and supports the efforts of the Collaborative.

The Bridges to Excellence program applies nationally-recognized, evidenced-based standards to the physician practice environment. Physicians may achieve recognition in three areas to be eligible for rewards. All areas employ standards established by the National Committee on Quality Assurance (NCQA):

- Diabetes care
- Heart-stroke care
- Physician office practices (e.g. electronic records)

North Carolina is among the first major markets to implement these three BTE pay-for-performance programs in three practice areas simultaneously. “With the addition of the metro Raleigh-Durham and Charlotte markets, Bridges to Excellence continues to be the largest national pay-for-performance program and will have a positive impact on millions of Americans in urban and rural counties,” said Francois de Brantes, president of Bridges of Excellence. The total rewards available to physicians in the state of North Carolina will be more than \$5 million.

Physicians may apply for BTE certification by providing documentation that the recommended standards of care are being followed. The NCQA and BTE web sites provide physicians with specific application procedures and assistance. Many community physicians are becoming certified across the nation, as BTE has been implemented in 17 markets with 3,000 physicians.

The Collaborative plans to implement three BTE programs by the end of 2007 and to begin compensating physicians in first quarter 2008. North Carolina is among the three largest markets across 18 states to implement BTE.

“These leading employers are not just implementing the BTE program to improve health care value for their employees and families, but they are also implementing the program to raise the quality of care for their customers as well,” said Ches Gwinn, Health Care Collaborative project manager with Aon Consulting.

Through the Collaborative, participating employers will compensate certified physicians who are NCQA-certified and meet certain additional criteria. Physician compensation will be based on the number of employees and dependents covered by participating employers who are treated by each physician or group. The eligible employees and dependents must reside within the six specified Research Triangle Area counties: Orange, Durham, Chatham, Franklin, Johnston, and Wake.

“The RTA Health Care Collaborative is poised to make a difference in the quality and cost of health care in the RTA area,” said Genie Komives, MD, senior medical director at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. “Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina has found the Bridges to Excellence model to be the right approach to health care quality incentives. By adopting Bridges to Excellence, the collaborative is in step with a national movement that is proving to be successful.”

Chris Viehbacher, president, US Pharmaceuticals, GlaxoSmithKline, agrees. “Chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, are causing health care costs to soar while patients’ health declines.” He suggests a three-part solution to provide better care and lower costs: preventive efforts that keep people healthy, proper medical intervention when individuals become ill, and continued innovation to find new cures and make life-ending diseases manageable. “Bridges to Excellence attacks the real driver of healthcare costs—chronic diseases—while empowering physicians to counsel patients to live healthier lives and to treat them in accordance with NCQA standards.”

The BTE model has been successful in communities across the country, including the Silicon Valley.

“The collaborative effort between Cisco, Intel, and Oracle, known as the Silicon Valley Pay-for-Performance Consortium, was so significant that we wanted to repeat it in another location with a large concentration of employees,” said Sharon Gibson of Cisco. “The results highlighted that the number of physicians recognized by BTE nation-wide doubled. This approach is a win-win for Cisco and our health care system.”

“CIGNA HealthCare is a leader in providing our customers and members with the meaningful information that they need to make appropriate health care choices,” stated Scott Josephs, MD, market medical executive for CIGNA HealthCare in North Carolina. “We are excited to be part of the RTA collaboration and encourage the use of Bridges to Excellence standards as they provide a platform from which to improve care and recognize physicians who meet or exceed agreed upon national quality measures.”

“Primary care physicians routinely make patient care decisions based on their best judgment and current treatment protocols. BTE supports the physician by evaluating care based on disease management standards,” said Robert Horton, MD, Clinical Quality Committee Chairman, Key Physicians IPA.

To Apply for Bridges to Excellence Recognition

Physicians can obtain application and recognition information through the NCQA website at web.ncqa.org/tabid/431/Default.aspx and BTE website at www.bridgestoexcellence.org.

To Become a Member of the RTA Healthcare Collaborative

Employers and providers wishing to become active in the RTA Collaborative can contact Ches Gwinn at 704-347-2380 for further information.

About Bridges to Excellence

Bridges to Excellence (BTE) is a not-for-profit, coalition-based organization created to encourage significant leaps in the quality of care by recognizing and rewarding health care providers who demonstrate that they deliver safe, timely, effective, and patient-centered care. BTE works with large employers, health plans, providers and a wide range of organizations that have a shared goal of improving quality and patient outcomes. BTE is a member of The Partnership for Value-driven Health Care, a group formed in late 2006 in response to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt’s call for employers to implement the “four cornerstones of value-driven health care.” For more information visit www.bridgestoexcellence.org.