

COMMUNIQUE (November 2021)

Highlights of 2021!

As the year draws to an end, it is a fitting moment to review the successes and challenges of the past 12 months while at the same time looking ahead to the opportunities for the expansion of HQA into various sectors of the health care industry.

2021 was the 17th consecutive year in which HQA reported on clinical quality, on a data set representing just under 80% of all the medical scheme insured lives in South Africa. The data set is made up of a health quality metrics consisting of nearly 200 indicators, across 4 categories, namely: primary care and prevention, chronic disease management, maternity and new-born and hospital care.

Participation in the annual HQA Health Quality Report is voluntary. The results are reported in a confidential manner and are used by the participants in a process of continuous improvement. An Industry Report is shared with HQA's non-participating members and relevant stakeholders.

HQA, as part of its MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) with the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS), and for as far as it can reasonably be surmised from its analysis, reports any matters to the CMS affecting the quality of healthcare universally, that could be targeted for regulatory review or intervention.

In 2021 HQA's Board of Directors was enlarged, diversified and strengthened with the addition of Dr Angelique Coetzee from SAMA (South African Medical Association), Dr Philip Matley from SAPPF (South African Private Practitioners Forum), Dr Paul Soko from LifeHealth and Dr Samu Dube from Medscheme. Ms Marie van der Merwe, from SANCU (South African National Consumer Union), a stalwart member of the Board for many years, passed on due to Covid-related complications.

HQA is a Not-For-Profit Company and Public Benefit Organisation. The HQA Board has developed and adopted a charter as part of its determination to uphold sound governance principles. A representative from CMS also attends the HQA Board Meetings and other technical HQA forums.

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Directors: BA Dickson (Chairperson) Dr JHB Steenekamp (Vice Chairperson)
Dr A Coetzee, Dr S Dube, Dr V Gqola, Dr U Mahlati, M Marais, Dr PJ Matley, Dr N Naidoo, Dr RM Naidoo, Dr P Soko, S Collie* (*Alternate Director*)

In August of 2021, HQA held its 17th annual Industry Results Presentation and Clinical Quality Conference where much of the focus was on measuring and reporting outcomes. Part of this has included reaching out to many different stakeholders and collaborations are being developed with the College of Medicine, Medical Research Council, Academic Institutions, Health Professions Council, OHSC (Office of Health Standards and Compliance), Professional Associations and Hospital Groups. Following the HQA conference, a Multi Stakeholder Meeting took place on the 23rd of November to further the HQA aim of facilitating a process of setting up registries. Our colleagues from ICHOM (International Consortium of Health Outcomes Measurement) presented at two of these meetings and are instrumental in developing a pathway towards outcomes measurement and reporting for HQA and its members.

What can be expected in 2022?

HQA will continue to enhance the value of its analysis and reporting to participating funders through enriching the dataset, standardising definitions and coding, reviewing and improving the quality metrics and a user-friendly reporting system aimed at optimising the value of participation. The CAB (Clinical Advisory Board) has also embarked on a process of standardising definitions for hospital admissions.

A meeting will be convened early in 2022 with health actuaries and data/coding specialists in order to review the technical methodologies applied by HQA. The purpose of the meeting will be to improve on transparency and standardisation, as well as increasing the credibility of HQA's methodologies.

It has to be remembered that Health Quality can, and should be measured, reported and continuously improved, on three levels, namely structure, process and outcomes. If the appropriate structures are not in place, quality healthcare can hardly be achieved. If clinical best practice processes are being followed, good outcomes can be expected, and measuring outcomes is a test of the end result.

The value of process indicators should not be underestimated. It is recognised worldwide as a very effective way of measuring health quality. Measuring outcomes in a robust and accurate manner is a complex, resource intensive and long-term exercise. In the absence of outcomes measures, process measures serve a valuable role in ensuring patients the correct treatment at the right time in the right setting at the right price.

It is for this reason that HQA is an ideal position to develop a culture of measuring, reporting and improving health quality amongst practitioners and facilities by developing reports from its current data and health quality metrics, as a forerunner to setting up registries and reporting outcomes. This will require the consent of the funder participants and is work in progress. Such reports will be designed in collaboration with practitioner groups. Reporting will be done confidentially, with an industry report indicating major trends, similar to the current practise with funders.

From the Multi Stakeholder Meeting that was held on 23rd November 2021, a recommendation was made by SAPPF to begin an outcomes project on prostate cancer. A smaller technical team will be convened in early 2022 that will scope and plan the project, together with partners from ICHOM. Progress reports on this initiative will be shared with HQA's members and stakeholders.

HQA's engagement with academic institutions continues to develop where HQA seeks endorsement of its health quality metrics and academic institutions can apply to access HQA's data for research projects. Such projects will require approval from the HQA Board and will need to be in support of HQA's strategic objectives. Any publications from such research would be co-authored by the researcher and HQA.

The HQA Board, in a strategy session planned for January 2022, will determine the framework of an initial OMRO (Outcomes Measurement and Reporting Organisation). The outcome of the session will inform the strengthening of HQA's internal capacity and funding needs, and will be used to engage the Department of Health and other strategic stakeholders, and for determining the budget and capacity planning for next year.

Looking to the future, HQA is committed to continue developing clinical quality standards and benchmarks for as many role players in the South African health care industry as possible. It has embarked on an ambitious path to draw in more players in both the private and public sector. And, as ever, HQA will continue to strive to be a well governed and sustainable going concern serving the interests of all in our country.

And for now?

With the end of the year around the corner and the festive season about to begin, it is time to say thank you to everyone for your support and collaboration. I wish you all a safe and a pleasant festive season and look forward to continue working with you in the new year.

Prepared by: Louis Botha (CEO)
November 2021

"If you want to get somewhere quick, go alone. If you want to go somewhere very far, go together!" An African proverb, often quoted by Warren Buffet, Al Gore, Hilary Clinton, Sen Cory Booker.

