



October 12, 2011

Dr. Carolyn Clancy  
Director, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
540 Gaither Road  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Dr. Clancy:

The National Transitions of Care Coalition (NTOCC) enthusiastically supports the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) new initiative to encourage clinicians and patients to engage in effective two-way communication to ensure safer care and better health outcomes. NTOCC believes that the improvement of transitions, or hand-offs, between care settings is integral to ensuring the delivery of high quality care. The communication of timely and accurate information between providers, patients and family caregivers is critical to effective care transitions.

As you know, the U.S. health care system often fails to meet the needs of patients during transitions because care is rushed and responsibility is fragmented, with little communication across settings and multiple providers. Poor communication during transitions from one care setting to another can lead to confusion about the patient's condition and appropriate care, duplicative tests, inconsistent patient monitoring, medication errors, delays in diagnosis, and lack of follow through on referrals. These failures create serious patient safety, quality of care, and health outcome concerns.

Most patients and family caregivers are not encouraged to play an active role when a transition in their care occurs, even though they are often the only constants in the transition. Few patients have the tools to effectively navigate the fragmented healthcare delivery system, while many mistakenly believe that information about their care is transferred in advance of appointments. In addition, a patient's own limited health literacy level, affected in part by cultural and ethnic barriers in language and understanding, can further impede communication.

AHRQ's education campaign will help patients understand the importance of taking control of their health care and the new tools will help facilitate sharing of information between patients and medical professionals. NTOCC has long advocated that patients should be provided with tools and resources to help make them informed consumers of care and identify questions to ask their care team during any transition. At a minimum, NTOCC believes that such tools should help patients and family caregivers identify what question to ask their care team, understand

who is involved in their care plan and clear time frames for steps in that care plan—such as tests and test results, follow- up appointments, and medication information.

To that end, NTOCC’s health care experts have developed a number of tools and resources for patients, family care givers and medical professionals to bolster communication and help navigate transitions. This includes “*NTOCC’s Taking Care of My Health Care Guide*” which provides patients and their family caregivers with the kind of information and questions they need to ask before they visit a health care professional. We encourage AHRQ, in addition to their own resources, to use these tools which can be found on NTOCC’s website at [www.ntocc.org](http://www.ntocc.org).

Again, we applaud AHRQ’s work to improve communication between patients and clinicians and look forward to continued engagement on ways to strengthen our health care system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheri Lattimer".

Cheri Lattimer  
Executive Director