What is “Quality” in Health Care?

What is “health care quality”? One study found fewer people rate their quality of care as excellent. But the term wasn’t defined. Did quality mean timely care, access to a doctor, enough time to ask questions, the right medication or treatment, feeling safe, or being listened to?

The Institute of Medicine defines quality as “the degree to which health care services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with current professional knowledge.” Government agencies and health plans are now measuring your doctors for “quality” and threatening them with penalties. As a result, doctors spend twice as much time on recording and reporting data than on patient care. Is that quality?


“Understanding Quality Measurement,” AHRQ, September 2012