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**CONSUMER REPORTS TEAMS WITH MINNESOTA GROUPS
TO RATE MORE THAN 500 DOCTORS' PRACTICES**

**CR, Minnesota Community Measurement, and HealthPartners Jointly Release
Evaluations; Ratings Reveal Variations in Cost and Care**

YONKERS, NY —In a special edition of its magazine, Consumer Reports is publishing Ratings of 552 Minnesota physician group practices and an analysis of Minneapolis-St. Paul medical groups focusing on cost and quality of care. The Ratings were compiled in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Minnesota Community Measurement (MNCM), a nonprofit organization that has worked since 2004 to improve health care and cut unnecessary cost.

Consumer Reports and MNCM found clinics delivering high-quality care for diabetes and cardiovascular disease throughout the state, and 37 practices earned CR's highest rating in both categories. Other practices didn't fare as well. Sixty-six practices earned CR's lowest score for diabetes care, 50 got the lowest score for cardiovascular care, and 24 for both.

Consumer Reports is producing a special version of its magazine for distribution to subscribers and newsstands in Minnesota. It will have a different cover, highlighting the story "How Does Your Doctor Compare?" and feature a special, 32-page insert with the Ratings of physicians' practices. The ratings of physician practices will also be available online at www.myhealthscores.org.

In a separate but related report, available nationally in the October issue of Consumer Reports and online at www.ConsumerReports.org, Consumer Reports compares cost and quality at 18 primary care doctor groups in Minneapolis and St. Paul. CR concludes that costlier care isn't always better. For that report, CR joined with HealthPartners, a non-profit health-care system that provides health insurance as well as physician and hospital care. HealthPartners also collects data related to quality of care, patient satisfaction, and affordability. Clinics operated by HealthPartners were among those that CR independently assessed.

For its Ratings of 552 Minnesota practice sites, Consumer Reports teamed up with MNCM, a non-profit group that works with health plans, medical groups, physicians, hospitals, employers, and consumers, is at the forefront of health-care ratings in Minnesota and nationally.

Unlike most top-doctor lists, the 500-plus physician group Ratings are based on quantifiable measures collected by the practices themselves on how well their patients control two of the most common and deadliest chronic diseases: diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Scores are based on the percentage of patients who achieve all of the targets for the best management of each of the two conditions. That means controlling both blood pressure and cholesterol levels and, in the case of diabetes, blood sugar levels, too. It also means not smoking and taking a low-dose aspirin to prevent heart attacks when appropriate.

“Good information on health care quality should be readily available to everyone,” said Jim Chase, president of Minnesota Community Measurement. “Consumer Reports can get more people to see these measures, and help them understand how to use them to get better care.”

The Ratings are being published on the heels of CR’s recent Ratings of doctors in Massachusetts, released in May. Both efforts are the result of a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation related to a unique program called Aligning Forces for Quality. That initiative is RWJF’s signature effort to lift the overall quality of health care in 16 targeted communities (including Massachusetts and Minnesota), reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and provide models for national reform.

“We are hopeful that Minnesota residents will use these independent findings to help them select physician practices that are the best match for their priorities and needs—and to work with their doctors to improve their quality of care. Excellent care does not need to be the most expensive care, and expensive care is not always the best quality,” said John Santa, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center. “We also hope these ratings will foster conversations among doctors about how they can continue to raise the quality of care they provide.”

Some highlights from the Ratings report:

- Thirty-seven practices earned CR’s highest Rating in both categories measured, diabetes and cardiovascular care. Eleven of them belong to the **Park Nicollet** group, eight to the **Allina Medical** group, six to the **Entira Family Clinics**, and three to **HealthPartners**. Most practices are in the Twin Cities metro area. But clinics from other cities are represented too. The **Mankato Clinic** in this list, for example, is in Mapleton, in the Southeast region of the state. And two clinics—**Allina Medical Clinic** in Prescott and **Ellsworth Medical Clinic**—are in Wisconsin, but serve patients who live or work in Minnesota.
- Overall, 68 practices earned CR’s top score for diabetes care, indicating that at least half of their patients reached five treatment goals for the condition. The statewide average is 38 percent. For cardiovascular care, 75 practices earned the highest Rating. The statewide average is 49 percent.
- But the news isn’t all good: 66 practices earned CR’s lowest score for diabetes care and 50 received the lowest score for cardiovascular care and 24 received the lowest score for both.
- Consumer Reports cautions patients not to panic and change their doctor if a practice receives a low score. Minnesota ranks first in the country in many measures of health care, and is above-average in many aspects of diabetes and cardiovascular disease care. So a practice that scores below average in Minnesota might still be average or better compared with practices elsewhere in the country.
- As noted above, in a separate report available in the October issue of Consumer Reports, CR’s Dr. Santa explains that consumers don’t have to pay top dollar for top-notch care. CR reached this conclusion after evaluating data provided by HealthPartners. The result: a Ratings chart highlighting the results for 18 primary-care doctor groups in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Some examples of groups with top marks for care at a lower cost include **Northwest Family Physicians**, **Entira Family Clinics**, and **HealthPartners Clinics**. For more details, see Dr. Santa’s column, “When costlier care isn’t better,” in the October issue of Consumer Reports and online at www.ConsumerReports.org.

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