

## Bridges to Excellence rewards docs for following guidelines

By *Elizabeth Thompson Beckley* / Nov 26, 2003

Doctors in Cincinnati and Louisville, Ky., recently earned the first bonuses in a diabetes-care reward program sponsored by an alliance of doctors, employers and health plans.

The pay-for-quality project, called Bridges to Excellence, was launched in April. The largest payment in the program to date is \$7,500.

Pay-for-performance initiatives are gaining traction, as reflected in the Medicare bill passed by Congress on Tuesday. The measure includes funding for a five-year demonstration project to evaluate how providing financial incentives or distributing guidelines can change the way physicians practice.

Although the couple dozen doctors recognized and total amount of rewards thus far are modest in the BTE effort, participating employers are "anxious to send out more and larger checks," says Brian Schilling, a spokesperson for the National Committee on Quality Assurance, which helped develop the diabetes physician recognition program used by the alliance.

Diabetes Care Link was introduced in the Cincinnati and Louisville metro regions as the first of three clinical focus areas. Physician Office Link, which will recognize physicians' investment in health information technology systems, will be launched later this year in Boston. Cardiac Care Link is scheduled to be launched in Albany, N.Y., early in 2004.

"We want doctors to know that delivering better care now has tangible as well as personal and professional benefits," says Francois de Brantes, program leader for the corporate healthcare initiatives at General Electric Co., in a written statement. "The rewards that Bridges to Excellence pays out helps doctors to reinvest in themselves and their practices to adopt the kinds of support systems necessary to deliver top-notch care. . . . By next year, we plan to issue several more checks--and for greater amounts."

To qualify for rewards in the BTE effort, doctors need to care for at least 10 patients from one of the sponsoring employers, Schilling says. In the diabetes program, physicians' performance is measured on providing important screenings and control of blood pressure, blood sugar and lipid levels.

High-performing doctors receive individual bonuses of \$100 for each diabetic employee or eligible family member they treat and are highlighted in physicians directories distributed by participating employers.