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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2005 HMO/POS Report Card Is Released

*HMO Performance Report stresses healthier lives through prevention
Health IT to transform health quality in Maryland*

BALTIMORE, MD (October 6, 2005) – *Measuring the Quality of Maryland HMOs and POS Plans: 2005 Consumer Guide*, the ninth annual report on the quality of care provided by health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and point-of-service (POS) health plans, was released today by the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC). The Guide is designed to assist Marylanders in selecting a health plan using comparative information to decide which plan will provide the best value for the cost

This guide brings together information from many sources to assist Marylanders in selecting a health plan right for their needs. Checklists, health planning tips, and plan contact information make this a useful source long after a consumer has selected a health plan.

"Good health care depends on good information. Our report cards help consumers make better choices of health plans, hospitals, and nursing homes - and help providers improve health care quality and patient satisfaction," said executive director Rex Cowdry, M.D.

This year's *Consumer Guide* responds to the growing awareness that prevention plays a central role in systematically changing individual behavior and addressing system issues that can adversely affect health. The effectiveness of prevention has been seen nationally as the overall death rate for cancers combined has declined since the early 1990s, as reported in the *Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer, 1975-2001*.

Preventive interventions contained in the *Consumer Guide* include breast cancer screenings, immunizations, and testing blood sugar levels of people diagnosed with diabetes to avoid further complications of the disease.

The individual HMO performance results show relatively high levels of preventive interventions but the possibility for improvement remains. A survey of HMO members reveals that approximately three out of four members who smoke received advice from their practitioners to quit. However, less than half of them received specific guidance on medications or strategies that would assist in making the behavior change.

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Health information technology will bring about quality improvement to Maryland's health care delivery system not previously experienced. During today's press briefing, Dr. Cowdry summarized how Maryland will lay the groundwork for the use of electronic medical records and health information exchange. "The innovations will lead to better health outcomes and lower costs by delivering the right information directly to the examining room and the bedside," said Dr. Cowdry.

The companion report enclosed in this mailing, ***Comprehensive Performance Report: Commercial HMOs & Their POS Plans in Maryland***, contains the full spectrum of measures and results plans were required to report to the state. Data are trended over a three-year period to provide a meaningful gage of how consistently each plan delivers high quality care or strives to bring improvements to its system.

Generally, the average rate of performance for plans included in this reporting effort continues to increase. For example, plans show sizeable three-year increases in adolescent immunizations, cholesterol control for members who have had a major cardiac event, and prenatal care, with increases of 16 percent, 13 percent, and eight percent over 2003 rates, respectively.

A version of the Guide specifically for state employees will become available in spring 2006 for their comparison of HMOs and POS plans offered during the next benefit period.

Basics about the Data

Evaluation of commercial HMOs and POS plans is based on two nationally recognized systems: Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS) and Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS® 3.0H) survey. MHCC used the survey to collect the opinions and experiences from a sample of 1,100 members of each plan. This survey is used by numerous organizations and employers, including the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), as part of its HMO accreditation process.

HMOs in the *Consumer Guide* collected data on the provision of services using instructions and criteria specified by HEDIS. HEDIS was developed by NCQA specifically for the measurement of the quality of services provided by health plans. An independent certified HEDIS auditor examined the data collected and reported by plans to the MHCC. "**Star Performers**" identified in the *Consumer Guide* denote plans that have had "above average" scores for three consecutive years beginning with 2003. Since 2004, three plans decreased in their number of star performer designations, while one plan showed an increase in its number of designations.

Free copies of the *Consumer Guide* are available at public libraries throughout the state. Copies of all reports may be obtained by calling the MHCC at 410-764-3460 or toll free at 877-245-1762. The reports are posted on the MHCC's Web site at <http://mhcc.maryland.gov/hmo/index.htm>. For further information, please contact Bruce Kozlowski, Deputy Director, Performance and Benefits; or Joyce Burton, Chief, HMO Quality and Performance Division, at 410-764-3460.

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