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For Immediate Release

AHRQ names Arkansas' first Patient Safety Organization Quality Excellence Inc. to offer new service to hospitals

LITTLE ROCK – Quality Excellence Inc., a subsidiary of the Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care, has been named the state's first federally authorized Patient Safety Organization.

The PSO system was created by Congress to help lower the incidences of medical harm in U.S. hospitals — including hospital-acquired infections, pressure ulcers, surgical mistakes and medication errors. The Institute for Healthcare Improvement estimates that there are 15 million such “harm events” every year, or more than 41,000 every day.

As a PSO, Quality Excellence Inc. will offer hospitals and other health care providers voluntary, confidential and legally privileged analysis of their data on medical errors to identify risks and hazards, and then work with the providers to create solutions in a non-punitive environment. Because the data is confidential and privileged, it will not be subject to subpoenas or use in lawsuits.

As Arkansas' Medicare and Medicaid Quality Improvement Organization, AFMC works with providers and beneficiaries to improve patient care and overall health. Quality Excellence Inc. will build on AFMC's 37 years of experience in quality improvement and continue its mission through patient safety consulting and other health care improvement activities, including Quality Excellence PSO.

“We are excited to be the first organization in the state to offer this important new service,” said Dr. Nick Paslidis, president and CEO of AFMC. “Nothing is more important to health care providers than their patients. Hospitals that work with Quality

Excellence PSO will be able to address safety issues with a new level of focus and insight.”

The Patient Safety Organization concept grew out of a landmark 1999 report by the Institute of Medicine called “To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System.” The report spotlighted a serious need to capture data that would help reduce harm to patients. The Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2005 created the structure for PSOs, and the federal Department of Health and Human Services began accepting applications for the program in late 2008.

Patient Safety Organizations must follow strict guidelines in accordance with the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act. Although they are authorized by the federal government, they do not receive government funding. Instead, they contract privately with hospitals.

The federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), which oversees PSOs, will establish a network of patient safety databases to which PSOs can voluntarily submit nonidentifiable information. This network will be maintained as an interactive, evidence-based management resource for providers, PSOs, and other entities. AHRQ will use the data to analyze national and regional patient safety statistics, including trends and patterns. The findings will be included in AHRQ's annual *National Healthcare Quality Report*.

For 37 years, through utilization review, quality improvement projects, and public education, the **Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care** has worked to improve the health of Arkansans. Our mission statement: To promote excellence in health care through evaluation and education. Visit our online newsroom at www.afmc.org/media.