

Sutter Health Publications Style Guide

2018 Edition

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Creative Services partnered with Marketing and Communications leads to develop the Sutter Health Publications Style Guide. Sutter employees can use this reference tool to help ensure a consistent and professional style when creating internal and external communications.

For all communications, please follow conventions outlined in [*The Associated Press Stylebook*](https://www.apstylebook.com/), commonly called the AP Stylebook. Keep in mind that it is most important to maintain a consistent editorial approach within each piece. This may call for the author’s best editorial judgment when a rule or principle is unclear.

For access to the online AP Stylebook, please contact:

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The following is an abbreviated style guide to cover items not mentioned in the AP Stylebook, items you will most likely encounter, and to indicate exceptions Sutter Health makes to the AP Stylebook. For spelling, style, usage and terms not mentioned in the AP Stylebook, refer to *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*.

You can find a current version of the style guide on the [Sutter Health Brand Center](http://brand.sutterhealth.org/login).

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# Alphabetical Reference Guide

## Acronyms

Use AP Style unless otherwise noted.

*Exceptions:* Affiliate abbreviations, such as CPMC and PAMF, are OK to use on second reference. It’s fine to refer to the Advanced Illness Management program as AIM on second reference.

Use OB/Gyn not OB/GYN.

**Affect or Effect**

Affect, as a verb, means to influence (e.g., the medicine affects alertness). Effect, as a noun, means result (e.g., drowsiness is one effect of the medicine).

## And/Or

Do not use the grammatical conjunction “and/or.” Use either “and” or “or.”

**Board-Certified and Board Certified**

Hyphenate when “board certified” is describing a noun, such as “She’s a board-certified therapist.” Do not hyphenate when it stands alone from the noun, such as “She’s board certified in therapy.”

**Canceled**

Use cancel, canceled, canceling and cancellation.

## Capitalization

Use AP Style unless otherwise noted.

Do not capitalize department names or medical specialties (see the Departments and Functions entry).

For additional capitalization guidance, see the Headers, Subheads and Menu Links entry.

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

When referencing the nation’s health protection agency, always spell out the full name. On second reference, it’s OK to use CDC.

## Dates

Use AP Style unless otherwise noted.

*Exception:* Some publications, such as posters and invitations, call for a design treatment that uses the more elegant presentation offered by Chicago Style (such as spelling out a month).

## Departments and Functions

* Capitalize the formal names of departments and offices (e.g., Operations; Sales and Marketing; Medical Management).
* Do not capitalize informal names and incomplete designations or functions, such as the sales team, marketing, the office, etc.
* Capitalize Board of Trustees and Board of Directors (e.g. the Board of Directors, Sutter Health Plus Board of Trustees). Do not capitalize informal names (e.g. the trustees, the board).
* Do not capitalize department names or medical specialties. References to the emergency department, intensive care unit, gastroenterology department and other such names should be lowercase. (Example: Kim Fong, M.D., specializes in maternal/fetal medicine. Mr. Smith was brought to our emergency room for shortness of breath and was transferred to the intensive care unit).

## Disabilities

In general, do not describe an individual as disabled or handicapped. If absolutely required, use specifics (e.g., Muhammad Ali, boxing hero and a former Olympic champion, defied the symptoms of Parkinson’s to light the torch in a rare public appearance). Use the term “accessible” in place of disabled or handicapped (e.g., accessible parking).

## Diseases (Including Diabetes)

Do not capitalize arthritis, pneumonia, etc. When a disease is known by the name of a person identified with it, capitalize only the individual’s name (e.g., Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease). Avoid such expressions as “he is battling cancer” or “she is a diabetic.” Use neutral, precise descriptions, such as “he has stomach cancer” or “she has Type 2 diabetes.” When discussing diabetes, indicate on first reference whether it is Type 1 or Type 2. Always capitalize the “Type” it is and use a numeral after it: Type 1 or Type 2.

**Diabetes —** There are two main forms of this disease: Type 1, formerly called juvenile diabetes, and Type 2, the most common kind, formerly called adult-onset diabetes.

## e.g. versus i.e.

The Latin abbreviations e.g. and i.e. are commonly used in English, and commonly mixed up.

e.g. stands for *exempli gratia*, which means “for example.” Use e.g. to introduce one or more possibilities among many.

The announcement was so intoxicating to the world’s sci-fi geeks (e.g. me) that they’ve been gearing themselves up for a work of genius.

i.e. stands for *id est* which means “that is.” Use i.e. when what you are introducing is equivalent to, or an explanation of, what comes before it in the sentence.

The Harvard Report compared “professional” reviewers (i.e. those working for newspapers and magazines) with their new competition.

## Electronic Health Record

Refer to Sutter’s electronic health record as Sutter EHR. (Avoid referring to it as Epic, the Epic System, EpicCare, etc.) Upon first reference, spell out electronic health record; thereafter, use the acronym EHR. The patient component is My Health Online.

**Food and Drug Administration**

Use Food and Drug Administration on first reference. FDA is acceptable on second reference.

## Headers, Subheads and Menu Links

Capitalize all words used in menu links, page headers and subheads.

Capitalize “the,” “a,” and “an,” or words fewer than four letters if it’s the first or last word in a title or header.

Uppercase the second word in a hyphenated word (e.g., Help for Life-Threatening Illnesses, Long-Term Impact of Chemotherapy and Important Follow-Up Care).

*Exception*: Don’t capitalize short conjunctions of fewer than four letters or prepositions. Capitalize “the,” “a,” and “an,” or words fewer than four letters if it’s the first or last word in a title or header.

Examples: Ask the Expert; All About Your Health; The Daily Checkup; Get in Shape Today; We Know It’s Cold Outside; Kale is Your Friend; Get More Information; A Monthly Guide.

*Exception*: In landing pages, use Title Case for short headers. Use Sentence case for the longer headlines. For example, All Things Baby; Welcoming infinite potential to the world.

## Health Maintenance Organization

Spell out and lowercase the term “health maintenance organization” on the first reference; thereafter, use the acronym HMO. The term “health plan” as a descriptor after HMO is acceptable (e.g., HMO health plan).

*Exception:* Do not spell out HMO when used to refer to insurance products (e.g., We offer HMO and PPO products).

## Healthcare

In a breakaway from AP Style, Sutter Health refers to healthcare in all instances as one word unless “health care” is used as part of a proper noun (e.g., American Health Care Association). Using the one-word version helps enhance search engine optimization, which is critical for Sutter Health’s website, social media channels, news blogs and other digital assets.

*Exception:* When referring to Sutter Care at Home services, say “home health care.”

## Healthcare Reform

This refers to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed into law by former President Obama in 2010, as well as any related rules, regulations or guidance. ACA is acceptable on second reference. Do not use the term “Obamacare,” as this may have a negative connotation.

## Hyphens (-)

Follow AP Style.Do not place a hyphen between the prefixes anti, pre, semi, sub, etc., and nouns or adjectives, except before proper nouns. However, avoid duplicated vowels or consonants (e.g., semidetached, antiwar, pre-enroll).

Use hyphens to connect compound modifiers (e.g., As an all-around solid client, he returned his pre-enrollment materials on time and never griped about his coinsurance amounts).

Do not use a hyphen on adverbs ending in -ly (e.g., We offer affordably priced health plans). *Exception:* A word already ending in -ly would be hyphenated as an adverb (e.g., family-friendly fun)

Use a hyphen between numbers, when referencing phone numbers (e.g., 123-455-6789).

Hyphenate words when used as adjectives (e.g., The employer group has several full-time employees; most of the employees work full time) Below are examples of commonly hyphenated adjectives:

Breast-fed

C-section

Co-worker

Double-occupancy

Follow-up

Full-time

Hand-washing

High-deductible

High-quality

HSA-eligible plans

Life-threatening

Long-term

Non-emergency

Non-participating providers

Non-urgent

Not-for-profit

On-call

On-site; off-site

Out-of-area services

Out-of-network

Out-of-pocket costs

Part-time

Post-approval

Post-stabilization

Pre-approval

Pre-enrollment

Re-enrollment

Self-refer

Short-term

Third-party

Well-being

X-rays (always capitalize the “X” in X-ray)

Below are examples of words that should not include a hyphen:

biweekly (every other week)

breastfeeding, breastfeed

coinsurance

copay

copayments

cost sharing

multispecialty

multidisciplinary

nonmedicated

nonprofit

postoperative

postsurgical

preoperative

presurgical

semiweekly (twice a week)

sign up (as a verb; e.g., sign up for My Health Online)

systemwideyearlong

## Inclusive Language (He or She)

When possible, use gender-neutral language and avoid “he” or “she” when referring to an unspecified person. Instead, recast the sentence into the plural or avoid the use of pronouns altogether. For example:

Incorrect: Each student is expected to turn in his paper by the deadline.

Correct: Students are expected to turn in their papers by the deadline.

If a plural variation is not appropriate, “he or she” is preferable to “he/she.”

Avoid gender-specific titles or terms (e.g., chairman, businessman, etc.) and use terms, such as:

Chairperson vs. chairman

Executive or manager vs. businessman

Firefighter vs. fireman

Supervisor vs. foreman

Mail carrier vs. mailman

People vs. mankind

Workforce vs. manpower

## Lean

This term refers to increasing value while minimizing waste. Capitalize the first letter, but don’t use italics or quotation marks. (Example: The Lean initiatives focus on creating more value for customers while using fewer resources.)

## Like and Such As

Use “such as” instead of “like” when implying inclusion. Only use “like” when making a comparison to something similar.

Example: Instead of saying, “Janet enjoys sweets like doughnuts, cupcakes and macaroons,” say “Janet enjoys sweets, such as doughnuts, cupcakes and macaroons.”

Example: Frank McKracken, M.D., dreads seeing hypochondriac patients like Julie Upton.

## [Medi-Cal](https://www.medi-cal.ca.gov/), [Medicaid](https://www.medicaid.gov/), [Medicare](https://www.medicare.gov/)

## Always refer to the official government websites for the spelling of these types of terms.

## Mills-Peninsula Medical Center

## Always include the hyphen in “Mills-Peninsula.”

## My Health Online

Three separate words that refer to the online patient portal available through Sutter Health’s Electronic Health Record.

## Names

As a general rule, use a person’s first name and last name, unless the person is widely known and identified in professional or industry circles with an initial or middle name (e.g., Cher).

Following journalistic style, use a person’s full name upon first reference. Then refer to them throughout the rest of the text by their last name. (e.g., Clark Kent spearheaded the effort to sunset affiliate websites for Sutter Health. Kent started working for the nonprofit earlier this year.)

**Over or More Than**

When referring to quantity, use “more than” instead of “over.” Though the AP Stylebook editors relaxed the rules on this, it’s still preferable to use “more than.”

## Regions

Capitalize “greater” when used to define a community and its surrounding region (e.g., the Greater Central Valley and Sacramento areas). Common geographies in Northern California include:

Bay Area

East Bay area

Greater Central Valley area

Greater Sacramento area

North Bay area

Northern California

Sacramento area

South Bay area

Southern California

West Bay area

West Coast

Do not use “region” when referring to Sutter Health geographic areas. Instead, use Bay Area Operating Unit or Valley Operating Unit.

## Spaces

Use a single space after a period at the end of a sentence.

**Sutter Health Doctors and Foundation Doctors**

In general, Sutter Health does not provide care – our operating units and affiliates do. We have to be very careful, for legal reasons, in how we reference doctors and affiliates within the network to avoid any appearance that doctors are employed by Sutter Health or its network of affiliates.

Special care must also be taken when referencing foundation doctors. For example, doctors at Sutter Gould Medical Foundation are employed by a medical group that contracts with the foundation to practice medicine at foundation sites. We can’t say “foundation doctors.” Instead we can say “Tracy Care Center has affiliated specialty doctors for adults and children.”

We CANNOT Say:

* “Our doctors” or “Sutter Health doctors” or “Sutter Health physicians” or “Sutter Health surgeons”
* “Sutter Health hospitals” or “Sutter Health care centers”
* “Sutter Health Urgent Care”
* “Sutter Health Walk-In Care”
* “Doctors within Sutter Health” or “Our Doctors within Sutter Health”
* “Sutter Health has doctors and services…”
* “Sutter Health services include…”
* “You get great care with Sutter Health.”
* “We provide great care.”
* Sutter Health’s California Pacific Medical Center (avoid saying Sutter Health in front of affiliate names even though the logo says it).

We CAN Say:

* “Sutter Health network doctors” or “Sutter network doctors”
* “Sutter hospitals” or “Sutter care centers”
* “Doctors at [Sutter location/affiliate]” (merely denotes practice site rather than agency or control)
* “Sutter Urgent Care”
* “Sutter Walk-In Care”
* “Doctors within the Sutter Health network”
* “The Sutter Health network has doctors and services…”
* “Sutter Coast Hospital provides services including…”

(Always include the affiliate name when listing services. Specify where services are offered, if not available everywhere.)

Other Examples:

If content refers to provider facilities, keep in mind Sutter Health is not itself a healthcare provider. Rather, Sutter Health’s operating units (Sutter Bay Hospitals, Sutter Bay Medical Foundation, Sutter Valley Hospitals, and Sutter Valley Medical Foundation) *are* healthcare providers. We need to reference the Sutter or Sutter Health “network” whenever we’re discussing the provision of healthcare services – not just when discussing physicians.

If I’m promoting a PAFMG doctor, for a PAMF service, which can I say?

1. Dr. Kathryn Martires is a board-certified dermatologist with the Palo Alto Foundation Medical Group.
2. Dr. Kathryn Martires is a board-certified dermatologist at the Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

* Tone: With few exceptions, use first-person plural voice when referring to Sutter Health (“we,” “our,” not “its doctors”) and second-person voice when providing advice or guidance to the user (“you” not “their”).

**Other Phrases to Avoid**

* “our doctors”
* “our hospitals”
* “Sutter doctors”
* “expert doctors” or “expert care” (“expert” is a legal term of art)
* “life-saving”
* “best” or other superlatives
* “safe”
* “gold standard” or “standard of care”
* anything that can be construed to promise results or outcomes
* any “endorsement” of equipment/technology, including by implying other equipment/technology is substandard

Instead, use liberally phrases like “can,” “may,” “possibly,” “help,” etc.

**Sutter Medical Center, Sacramento**

Always include the comma in the formal name of the medical center.

## Phone

Use AP style unless otherwise noted.

## Time

Use AP style unless otherwise noted.

## Titles

Capitalize professional titles only when they appear immediately before a person’s name (e.g., Vice President Mary Jones). Do not capitalize titles that follow a name (e.g., John Smith, M.D., chief medical officer). The one exception is CEO; this acronym is rarely spelled out and is always capitalized.

Use the title Dr. only when referring to a medical doctor. Abbreviate the following titles when used before a full name: Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Mr., Mrs., Rep., the Rev., Sen. and certain military designations listed in the military titles entry in the AP Style Guide.

Names followed by Jr., Sr. or a Roman numeral do not have a comma after the last name (e.g., Giuseppe Verde, Jr., introduced himself to John Green III).

*Exception:* Capitalize titles in signature lines, such as letters and memorandums (e.g., From: Mary Jones, Vice President)

## Trademarks

Include trademark symbols (® ™) in superscript on first reference, including headlines and captions. Research brand-name medications for the appropriate symbols, as well as any special technology we use, such as MAKOplasty®, or awards, such as NCDR ACTION Registry®-

GWTG™ Platinum Performance Achievement Award. When referencing a brand name, such as BAND-AID®, remember to use the trademark symbols.

Trademark examples include:

CAHPS®

da Vinci® Robotic Surgery

eICU®

HEDIS®

OptumRx®

Quality Compass®

**Varian Radiosurgery TrueBeam™ STx System**

Please refer to the Use Disclaimer section of this guide for trademark requirements.

## Web and Online Terminology

Please refer to the [Online and Social Media Style chapter](#Heading_Online_Social), page 19

## Website Address

Please refer to the [Online and Social Media Style chapter](#Heading_Online_Social), page 19

# Formatting and Writing Style

## Bullets

While the AP Stylebook does not make a provision for bullets, Sutter Health recognizes the value of using bullets to present lists in some instances. Always use bullets instead of dashes, and use a colon to introduce a bulleted list:

* Capitalize the first letter at the start of each bullet.
* Bulleted lists should be used in lieu of numbered lists, unless there is a necessary order or hierarchy to the list.
* Lists with short phrases (fewer than four words) do not need periods at the end.
* Lists with longer phrases (four words or more), always have a period, even in cases of incomplete sentences.
* It’s important to be consistent when using periods at the end of bulleted list items. Either use periods throughout the list, or don’t use them at all. Do not use a mix-and-match approach within the same list, or with lists that follow each other in a short piece. Use your editorial judgment.
* Don’t use “see below” or similar variations to refer to bulleted lists or following copy. Instead, say something like: “Our network offers a variety of services, including:” followed by the bulleted list.
* Do not use double-bulleted lists.
  + For example, this second bullet within an already bulleted list is a no-no.
* Use an em dash, not periods or hyphens, when offsetting bold terms in bulleted list.

For example:

Psychiatric evaluation — A thorough assessment of mental health status, looking at symptoms; behaviors; effects on school, work, and relationships; speech and language abilities.

## General Writing Guidelines

**Brevity and Simplicity**

* Be direct. Write in straightforward language, always striving for tighter copy.
* Keep copy toned for the layperson and convey ideas in a conversational, clear and simple way. Aim for a 7th to 8th grade reading level.
* Avoid medical jargon, complicated acronyms and terminology that can’t be quickly explained with a simple phrase.
* Use short, action-oriented sentences. Avoid long paragraphs.
* Trim unneeded phrases and words, especially introductions such as “Indeed,” “Oftentimes,” “First of all,” “The fact that,” etc.
* When using medical words, simpler is better for non-clinical audiences (e.g., heart vs. cardiovascular; high blood pressure vs. hypertension; shot or vaccine vs. immunization).

**Tone of Voice**

* Our general tone is personal, warm and knowledgeable. It should read like a caring, succinct explanation of a medical condition or treatment option delivered by a friend (who is also a great doctor).
* Use active voice. If you can end the sentence with “by zombies,” you are in passive voice. Example: “An MRI was performed on your knee … by zombies.” Instead, say “Your doctor performs an MRI on your knee.”
* Be definitive. Instead of “You should see your doctor two to four times a year,” use “See your doctor two to four times a year.”
* With few exceptions, use first-person plural voice when referring to Sutter Health (“we,” “our,” not “its doctors”) and second-person voice when providing advice or guidance to the user (“you” not “their”).
* For pediatric conditions or materials, never use second-person voice, as parents are reading this, not children, and therefore “you” is not appropriate. Instead, you can say “your child.”
* For content that is for both doctors and patients, it’s OK to avoid “you” and incorporate the word “patient(s)”.
* Contractions are acceptable and reflect a more personal and informal tone; *Webster's New World College Dictionary* includes many entries for contractions (e.g., “aren't” for “are not”; “that’s” for “that is”; “it’s” for “it is”).

For more information about the Sutter Health brand, visit the [intranet page](http://mysutter/About/Strategy/ourbrand/Pages/default.aspx).

**Writing** **Basics**

* Avoid fluffy marketing language and phrases that can’t be backed up by facts (usually terms such as “greatest,” “best,” “highest standards of care,” etc.)
* Avoid colloquialisms and slang expressions (e.g., guys, yeah, stuff, cool, etc.)
* Avoid line breaks in email addresses, telephone numbers and website addresses.
* Cite studies and statistics (briefly). When appropriate, link to these sources.
* Do not mention retail stores or brands by name, as readers may infer that Sutter Health recommends or endorses them; use only if specifically necessary in context. Example: Use “tissue” instead of the brand name “Kleenex®.”
* Do not underline words for emphasis; use italics or boldface.
* Do not use an initial indent on the first sentence of a new paragraph.
* Avoid using questions or quotes in the headline or lead paragraphs of articles.
* *Exception:* Some communications call for a more formal tone (e.g., legal, provider, clinical or technical correspondence). In such instances, evaluate the use of scientific or medical terms, as well as contractions, first-person pronouns and abbreviated versions of words.

# Health Plan Acronyms

See the Acronyms section for guidelines on the use of acronyms. There is a comprehensive list of healthcare acronyms on the [Sutter Health intranet](http://mysutter/Resources/Acro-Engine/Lists/AcroEngine/WebView.aspx).

Here is a list of commonly used acronyms in healthcare:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Acronym** | **Meaning** |
| ACA | Affordable Care Act |
| ACO | Accountable Care Organization |
| CAHP | California Association of Health Plans |
| CAHPS | Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems |
| CAP | corrective action plan |
| CDC | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention |
| CDI | California Department of Insurance |
| CMS | Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services |
| DHCS | Department of Health Care Services |
| DHHS | Department of Health and Human Services |
| DMHC | Department of Managed Health Care |
| DOI | Department of Insurance |
| EHB | essential health benefits |
| EOC | evidence of coverage |
| EPO | Exclusive Provider Organization |
| FDA | Food and Drug Administration |
| HMO | health maintenance organization |
| IHA | Integrated Healthcare Association |
| IPA | independent practice association |
| KKL | Knox-Keene license |
| PBM | pharmacy benefit manager |
| PCP | primary care physician |
| PMG | participating medical group |
| PPO | preferred provider organization |
| RBO | risk-bearing organization |
| SBC | Schedule of Benefits and Copayments |
| SHP | Sutter Health Plus |
| SNF | skilled nursing facility |
| TTY | Teletypewriter |
| USBHPC | US Behavioral Health Plan, California |

# Online and Social Media Style

Sometimes when text appears on Facebook and other social media, editorial style is more relaxed to save space on short posts. Sutter Health’s social media strategies, policies and best practices provide guidelines that are more specific. [These policies also apply to Sutter Health’s websites, blogs and other digital content assets.](http://brand.sutterhealth.org/content/index/guid/publications_style_guide)

## Web and Online Terminology

app, short for application; a program that runs inside another service

blog

cyberattack

e-book

email (or Email at the beginning of a sentence); use lowercase letters and italicize (*info@sutterhealth.org*)

geolocation, geotagging

hashtag

homepage

hyperlink

internet (external)

intranet (internal)

livestreaming

log in, log out (verb)

login, logout (noun)

log off

online

(PDF); put (PDF) right after a link that goes to a PDF for accessibility reasons

podcast

pop-up (noun)

smartphone

social media

Team Sutter app

the web

[URLs; see Website Address entry](#website_address)

web browser

webcam

webcast

webinar

webmaster

webpage

website

World Wide Web

## Web and Online Terminology — Social Media

Facebook page

follow/friend/like; acceptable as nouns and verbs when referring to the way people interact on social media sites

Follow us on Twitter or like us on Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

live-tweeting, live-tweeted, live-tweet

retweet

Snapchat

Twitter page

tweet (verb)

YouTube

## Numbers

Always use a numeral, unless a colloquialism like “one of a kind.”.

## Website Addresses

Use the shortest URL possible. Unless functionally required, do not use “www,” “http://” or the “trailing slash” and italicize website addresses (e.g., *sutterhealthplus.org*). If a web address, or URL, falls at the end of a sentence, use a period at the end. (e.g., I like *amazon.com*.)

# Use Disclaimers

## CAHPS®

CAHPS® is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The registered trademark symbol should be applied directly after the word “CAHPS®.” The organization must apply the trademark to every reference of the term “CAHPS” within the written material. At the bottom of the page where the trademark first appears, there should be a footnote which states “CAHPS® is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).”

***e*ICU®**

The *e*ICU® term is a registered trademark. Include the registration mark on first reference in an article and in headlines and captions. Always italicize the “e” and include this trademark signature line: *e*ICU® is a registered trademark of VISICU, Inc.

Note: *e*ICU refers to the actual unit. Other references should be more specific (e.g., *e*ICU program, *e*ICU service, *e*ICU team). The full term — electronic intensive care unit — is not registered.

## HEDIS®

The Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) is a registered trademark of NCQA. The registered trademark symbol should be applied directly after the word “HEDIS.” The organization need only apply the trademark to the first reference of the term “HEDIS” within the written material. At the bottom of the page where the registered trademark first appears, there should be a footnote which states “HEDIS is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).”

## National Committee for Quality Assurance or NCQA

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