

Testimony from Carol Robinson  
Interim Executive Director, Oregon Health Fund Board  
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House Health Committee

Chair Greenlick, Committee members, I'm Carol Robinson, Interim Executive Director of Oregon Health Fund Board. I'd like to start with a quote from Dr. Atul Gawande's book, *Better, A Surgeon's Notes on Performance*".

"People underestimate the importance of diligence as a virtue. No doubt this has something to do with how supremely mundane it seems. It is defined as "the constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken". There is a flavor of simplistic relentlessness to it. And if it were an individual's primary goal in life, that life would indeed seem narrow and unambitious.

Understood, however, as the prerequisite of great accomplishment, diligence stands as one of the most difficult challenges facing any group of people who take on tasks of risk and consequence. It sets a high, seemingly impossible, expectation for performance and human behavior. Yet some in medicine have delivered on that expectation on an almost unimaginable scale."

In Dr. Gawande's book "Better", he provides compelling accounts about how individual physicians, hospital systems, governments and even the World Health Organization have organized with diligence and an unrelenting drive for improving performance in health care to make a difference in the quality of health and the quality of care. Stories ranging from a hand washing campaign at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, to improvements made in delivering care on the battlefield, to the eradication of polio in India are just some of the examples shown where organized diligence can improve health outcomes.

The take away from reading this book, for me, was how simple some steps to improving quality can be, like increasing hand washing in hospitals, and how incredibly difficult it can be to break down barriers to change, whether in a hospital, in a government, or even within ourselves.

The formation of a Quality Institute, as you have heard, would organize the tremendous efforts of those who are delivering better performance, measuring performance and setting standards for improving performance, in a way that would replicate and elevate the diligence of some, to a scale where the entire state of Oregon could be a great example for Dr. Gawande's next book on improving quality in a health system.

Borrowing an analogy from my esteemed predecessor, Barney Speight, the Oregon Health Fund Board likens the formation of a Quality Institute to the formation of a symphony orchestra.

Each individual clarinet or viola or cello, playing a different song at the same time is cacophonous. But add a conductor and put the same sheet of notes in front of the musicians, and you will hear beautiful music from the same instruments. The organization of many efforts brings far greater results and for that reason, we believe the formation of a Quality Institute as part of a Health Authority in HB 2009, is an idea that will yield tremendous results for Oregon.