



CMS Revises Nursing Home Ranking Scale

By Alison Hollender*

Effective February 20, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) expanded the metrics that its nursing home comparison website, Nursing Home Compare, uses to rank nursing homes. Nursing Home Compare ranks nursing homes on a five-star rating system based on three categories: (1) results from onsite inspections; (2) performance on certain quality measures; and (3) staffing levels. Effective February 20, the website implemented two new quality measures to measure the use of antipsychotics for short-stay residents without the diagnosis of Schizophrenia, Huntington's Disease, or Tourette Syndrome, and the continued use of antipsychotics for long-stay residents with the same conditions. CMS added these measures to address concerns that antipsychotics often are prescribed for diagnoses that do not require them. CMS stated that it anticipates a 30% reduction in the use of antipsychotics by the end of 2016 as a result of these two new quality measures.

CMS also revised the way that a nursing home's staffing level is used to calculate its star ratings. A nursing home's staffing levels are case mix adjusted for the nursing home's patient populations. CMS previously allowed nursing homes to earn a four-star rating if they scored three stars on both the registered nurse hours-per-day and the total staffing hours-per-day metrics. Now a nursing home may earn a four-star rating only if it scores four stars on both its registered nurse and staffing metrics. It is important to note that compliance with state-specific staffing requirements may not be enough to retain a nursing home's current star rating. CMS increased the staffing level requirements that nursing homes must meet to achieve a four-star rating based on research linking staffing levels to a nursing home's overall quality.

CMS also implemented a plan for state survey agencies to perform onsite surveys of a sample of nursing homes across the United States to assess the accuracy of information that is reported to CMS for use in the nursing home star-rating system. These pilot surveys were conducted in 2014 in Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The results of these pilot surveys are available. Since the pilot surveys were completed, CMS announced that it will survey nursing homes nationwide in 2015. CMS will begin to train the surveyors for these nationwide surveys in April 2015.

CMS estimates that one-third of nursing homes will see a decline in their star rating based on these changes. However, CMS claims that sharing this information will allow consumers to make meaningful distinctions between nursing homes and enable nursing homes to continuously improve the care they provide.

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