

Eli's Hospice Insider

Quality: Newspaper Offers Up 'Hospice Compare' Substitute

Washington Post continues its scrutiny of the industry.

You'd better make sure your hospice cost report submission is accurate, because potential referral sources and patients can now access some of its data via a centralized website compiled by the Washington Post.

The Post has taken the hospice industry to task in a series of articles criticizing agencies for things ranging from high live discharge rates to a lack of General Inpatient, continuous and respite care. In its latest installment, the newspaper compiles data from numerous sources to offer a "Consumer Guide to Hospice" that lists data for nearly every hospice in the country.

"The Washington Post has gathered data largely from government sources on more than 3,000 hospices that participate in Medicare, which pays for the vast majority of hospice care in this country," according to the site at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/business/hospice-quality. "No single factor can predict the quality of a hospice's care, and these figures do not offer a complete picture of any single hospice. But consumers can benefit from knowing how a hospice compares to others on these important measures," the guide says.

Referral sources, patients, competitors, and others can look up and compare hospices on these measures: years of operation; last survey date; average daily spending on a patient (compared to state average); accreditation; "crisis care"; and typical patient care (compared to state average).

Average daily spending on a patient may be the benchmark that gets the most attention, observers predict. Will patients choose a hospice that has a \$185 per day amount as opposed to a \$67 amount, for example?

"The reasons that some hospices stint on care may be at least partly financial," the Post reports in an accompanying article. Medicare pays hospices per day. "That means that the less a hospice spends on nursing and other services, the more it can profit," the newspaper explains.

Medicare won't publish hospice data to compare until 2017 at the earliest, the Post notes.

Hospice providers are finding many reasons to criticize the new tool.

For example: Some provider-based hospices complain because they are left out of the guide which covers freestanding hospices only. On the other hand, those hospices that are included complain that their published stats do not match up with those they maintain internally.