

Eli's Hospice Insider

Referrals: Polish Your Processes In Preparation For Publicly Reported Ratings

Hospice Compare, 5-star ratings on deck in new proposed rule.

You've had a lot of reimbursement changes to tackle this year under hospice payment reform, but now it may be time to put more resources into your quality assurance program.

Why? Critics such as the **Medicare Payment Advisory Commission** have long complained that hospice has few quantifiable data points for assessment and that Medicare hospice spending is a little like throwing money into a black hole. Now the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** is hoping to increase and improve its hospice data with its forthcoming Hospice Compare website and star ratings.

In addition to adding quality measures in 2017, including one on hospice staff visits in the last days of life (see story, cover), CMS wants to get its Hospice Compare website up and running "sometime in the spring/summer of CY 2017," CMS says in its 2017 hospice payment proposed rule released April 21. The site would include hospices' scores for seven quality measures (see story, p. 44) and CAHPS patient satisfaction data, CMS says in the rule published in the April 28 Federal Register.

Exception: Hospices with fewer than 20 eligible patient stays annually would not have data displayed on Hospice Compare, CMS expects. "A quality measure score on the basis of small denominator size may not be reliable," the agency explains.

CMS will furnish education in a variety of ways about Hospice Compare prior to the website's launch, and will offer hospices preview reports of their Hospice Compare data before it is posted, the agency notes in the rule.

Plus: "Like other CMS Compare websites, the Hospice Compare website will, in time, feature a quality rating system that gives each hospice a rating of between 1 and 5 stars," CMS says. It hasn't yet announced a timeline for adding star ratings.

The new measures CMS is proposing "could be measures that are part of their star ratings in the not-too-distant future," warns **Theresa Forster** with the **National Association for Home Care & Hospice**. You should focus on understanding and improving your existing quality measure ratings as well as preparing for the upcoming ones.

Warning: If you wait until after the new measures are implemented to start working on them, low initial scores could contribute to a low star rating, affecting your referrals or contracting relationships.

In the meantime, CMS plans to get its public reporting ball rolling for the industry by initially posting "demographic data of hospice agencies that have been registered with Medicare" by this summer. "This list will include addresses, phone numbers, and services provided for each agency," CMS explains in the rule.