

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Regulatory Trends: HHS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS KEY SURVEY, MDS REFORMS

Life could get a lot easier for nursing homes if the **Health & Human Services' Advisory Committee on Regulatory Reform** has its way.

The committee recently released a final set of over 200 recommendations aimed at easing health care providers' regulatory burden and improving quality of care in the process. HHS Secretary **Tommy Thompson** last year created the panel of consumers, doctors, nurses and other professionals to guide the agency in its efforts to cut government red tape. Key survey recommendations direct HHS to standardize the survey investigative protocols and increase training for state survey teams. HHS should "focus training on the proper interpretation of the regulatory compliance requirements placed on nursing facilities," the committee advises.

Advisory members also envision convening "stakeholders" to help revise survey regulations and guidance for providers and surveyors.

The report includes a slate of changes that would allow nursing home providers to spend less time doing the minimum data set □ and more time caring for residents. These changes include:

- Clarifying with interpretive guidance that the MDS is a source document and does not require supporting documentation to justify coded responses.
- Adopting a continuous quality improvement process to keep the MDS tool and the Resident Assessment Instrument process current with medical practice and changing delivery systems.
- Consolidating the number and timing of all MDS assessments to those required for care planning, to the maximum extent possible.

What's Next?

HHS now plans for an internal committee to review the recommendations and field them to the appropriate agencies for action, "or that's our understanding of the next step," **Ruta Kadonoff**, a health policy analyst with the **American Association of Homes & Services for the Aging** tells **Eli**.

The **American Health Care Association** is confident that some of the committee's recommendations will make it into policy, according to **Janet Myder**, the group's director of regulatory systems, who gave an update at the recent AHCA convention in New Orleans. "Some of the recommendations can be implemented by program memorandum," she said, "while others will require changes to the regulations." Editor's Note: Read the full report at www.regreform.hhs.gov.