

OASIS Alert

News You Can Use: New Site Links You To Home Health Resources

CMS announces the birth of a new Web site.

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** launched its new home health Web site June 16. Christened "Home Health Information Resources for Medicare" and found at www.cms.hhs.gov/providers/hha, the site attempts to collect all home health information in one place. From advance beneficiary notices to therapy resources, an alphabetical site index makes it easier to find what you need. It also links you to listservs, the Home Health Compare site and regional home health intermediaries, as well as many other resources.

1. CMS is waiting on clearance to issue a report about changes it plans to make to OASIS based on suggestions from the home health industry, among others, the agency reported at the June 4 Open Door Forum for home health and durable medical equipment. The agency hasn't yet determined if it will make meetings of the OASIS Technical Expert Panel (TEP) open to the public. The TEP debates and recommends OASIS changes.
2. Errors in prescriptions filled by seniors have more than doubled since 1999, according to a recent study by **Medco Health Solutions**, reported the Boston Herald. The study analyzed data on 6.3 million seniors and found more than 7.9 million errors in their prescription medications. Common problems Medco identified included overdoses, improper treatments and concurrent prescriptions that interfere with each other.
3. Researchers found diabetic education via telemedicine was as effective as in-person education. The April issue of the **American Diabetes Association's** Diabetes Care magazine features a study comparing the two methods of providing diabetes education, by a team led by **SUNY Upstate Medical University** researcher **Roberto Izquierdo**. The telemedicine group reported high satisfaction. Both groups experienced the same success in changing behavior, and had similar improvements in their glycemic control.
4. The average profit margin for Medicare-certified agencies under PPS (from October 2000 to June 2002) has been 7.12 percent, say results from a study of 6,424 HHA cost reports under the prospective payment system. That's compared to the staggering 21.9 percent profit margin the **Medicare Payment Advisory Commission** claimed for 2001 in its March report to Congress this year.

The National Association for Home Care & Hospice conducted the study and had it verified by **Muse and Associates**. NAHC's study replicates the MedPAC study but uses a much larger sample size, says Muse, a Washington, DC health policy firm that provides cost estimates and analysis.

More than 30 percent of HHAs had a Medicare profit margin of zero or a Medicare loss in the 2001-2002 fiscal year, NAHC discovered in its cost report analysis. Taking the 15 percent cut and the elimination of the 10 percent rural add-on into account, NAHC expects 37 percent of providers to break even or see a loss on Medicare in 2003.