

OASIS Alert

OASIS News: Hurry- You May Have Just Enough Time To Order New Computers

If you don't upgrade your computer system in the next eight months, you may find yourself shut out by CMS.

To accommodate the upcoming Quality Improvement and Evaluation System (QIES) in January 2006, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** is scheduled to transition to new QNet approved reporting software by Dec. 31, the agency warns in a March 10 memo to surveyors (S&C 05-22) at www.cms.hhs.gov/medicaid/survey-cert/sc0522.pdf.

Agencies without the minimum system requirements outlined in the letter will be unable to access outcome based quality improvement reports and submission and error reports, CMS says. A survey of 15,000 nursing homes indicated that about one-third had computers that were too old to support the new software, CMS reports. It expects home health agencies to have similar problems.

1. **In its annual March report, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission** tells Congress the prospective payment system provides ample money for HHAs and suggests a rate freeze for 2006. MedPAC projects an annual 2005 profit margin for agencies of 12 percent.

In contrast, the **National Association for Homecare and Hospice** expects agencies to show a 2 percent profit margin. MedPAC's chapter on home health is at www.medpac.gov/publications/congressional_reports/Mar05_Ch02d.pdf.

2. **CMS is implementing sweeping** appeals changes required by the Benefits Improvement and Protection Act of 2000 and the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, including direct appeal rights for HHAs. The agency will start putting the appeals changes into effect this summer, it says in an interim final rule published in the March 8 Federal Register at www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fedreg/a050308c.html.

Editor's Note: You can find out more about CMS' revamped appeals process in Eli's Home Care Week, at www.elihealthcare.com or by calling 1-800-874-9180.

3. **Providers in intermediary Palmetto GBA's** service area shouldn't be surprised if their paper Return To Provider reports stop coming. Palmetto has discontinued the paper RTP notices for agencies in the Southeast and Southwest regions, and the rest of the states won't be far behind, the intermediary says in its March newsletter