

OASIS Alert

Outcomes: FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, HOME HEALTH COMPARE GOES LIVE

It may take months for CMS to put the correct information on the new Web site meanwhile you could be losing referrals.

Just missing the planned April launch date, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** launched the Home Health Compare Web site May 1, comparing patient outcomes for home health agencies in eight pilot states. But the site also lists administrative data name, address, phone number, services provided, initial date of certification and type of ownership for all agencies nationwide.

All HHAs can learn from the pilot states' experience. When CMS furnished a data preview, the good news was the patient outcomes data appeared accurate, state home health representatives tell **Eli**. But the bad news was widespread problems with the administrative data, says **Pat Kelleher** with the **Home & Health Care Association of Massachusetts**.

The most problematic of the issues relates to contracted therapy staff, explains **Gene Tischer** with **Associated Home Health Industries of Florida**. In their licensure applications, HHAs have three choices to check for each type of discipline furnished: provided by employed staff, provided by contracted staff, or provided by both types of staff.

CMS' software was not picking up the contracted staff option when it listed the services provided by an agency, omitting that service for agencies who checked that choice, continues **Mary Schantz** with the **Missouri Alliance for Home Care**. It has since fixed the problem, CMS says.

Still, many HHAs that use contracted therapists may show up as not furnishing therapy services unless the administrative data is corrected, Tischer points out. If patients or referral sources check such an agency out on the Web site, they may pass it over if they need therapy.

Even if your HHA is not in one of the eight pilot states, **Heather Rooney** from Seattle-based **Outcome Concept Systems** recommends you go to the Home Health Compare Web site to check your administrative data. "While your outcomes information will not be published until late fall, your agency's contact information, brief service description, ownership model, and date of Medicare certification have been published for public viewing," Rooney says.

HHAs should report administrative data errors to their state licensing departments, Tischer notes. Quality Improvement Organizations handle reports of patient outcomes data errors.

Corrections made by the beginning of each month will be reflected on the site when it is updated about every four weeks, a CMS spokesperson explained during the May 7 Home Health Open Door Forum.

Another Home Health Compare concern agencies expressed during the forum involved the demographic information about which agencies serve a specific area. The CMS spokesperson acknowledged the program "needs tweaking" to improve the accuracy of this information and confirmed that CMS is working with state associations to correct the errors.

Editor's Note: Home Health Compare is at www.medicare.gov/HHCompare/home.asp.