CMS to Improve Nursing Home Compare in April

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) plans to update the Nursing Home Compare website and the five-star quality rating system to improve the accuracy and value of the information on the site so that it reflects more transparent and meaningful information about the quality of care that each nursing home is giving its residents. The changes will take place next month.

One of the changes concerns revisions to the inspection process. In February 2018, CMS froze the health inspection star ratings category after implementing a new survey process for long-term care facilities. Because facilities receive surveys at different times, some facilities would have been surveyed under the old process and others under the new process. If CMS had not placed a freeze on health inspection star ratings, the facilities would have been scored using two different evaluation processes, making the outcomes misaligned and the data inaccurate. CMS froze the health inspection star rating score until all nursing homes were surveyed at least once under the new survey process for long-term care facilities. Ending the freeze enables consumers to see the most up-to-date status of a facility's compliance.

CMS is also setting higher thresholds and evidence-based standards for nursing homes' staffing levels. Currently, facilities that report seven or more days in one quarter with no registered nurse on-site are automatically assigned a one-star staffing rating. In April, the threshold for the number of days without an RN on-site in one quarter that triggers an automatic downgrade to one star will be reduced from seven days to four days. CMS is also making changes to the quality component on Nursing Home Compare that would improve identifying differences in quality among nursing homes, raise expectations for quality, and incentivize continuous quality improvement.

To provide further value and remain consistent with CMS's Meaningful Measures initiative, the update also includes adding measures of long-stay hospitalizations and emergency room transfers, and removing duplicative and less meaningful measures. CMS is also establishing separate quality ratings for short-stay and long-stay residents and revising the rating thresholds to better identify the differences in quality among nursing homes.

More information is available on the Nursing Home Compare website.