



## MAKING MEDICARE MAKE SENSE

*Answers To Some of The Most Commonly Asked Medicare Questions*

**Q:** Medicare recently announced new information on their hospital website that helps patients shop for hospital care based on quality and price so for the first time consumers have critical and trusted information in order to choose a quality hospital. What is this resourceful information, and why should I compare hospitals?

**A:** On March 28, 2008, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), unveiled new survey information at the Hospital Compare consumer website, [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov), offering consumers more insight about the hospitals in their communities.

For the first time consumers will be able to see how patients feel about their hospital stay through showing the results of patient satisfaction surveys collected from more than 2,500 hospitals. This new Hospital Compare website will now make it easier for consumers and their families to get accurate, practical information when they need it to evaluate their local hospitals when they have time to choose the best hospital for their condition.

In addition to adding this new information from adult patients over the age of 18 about their hospital stays, CMS has added information about the number of certain elective hospital procedures provided to those patients and what Medicare pays for those services. **So for the first time, consumers have the three critical elements -- quality information, patient satisfaction survey information, and pricing information for specific procedures -- they need to make effective decisions about the quality and value of the health care available to them at their local hospitals.**

Choosing a hospital that gives *quality care* and *good service* may help someone get better faster, avoid other health problems and have a better hospital experience.

You can't always plan ahead when you need a hospital, but when you can, take time to compare. Use Medicare's consumer website at [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov) to find information about hospital quality. This site is easy to use, just read and follow the links.

**On this website, you can compare the quality of hospitals in your area and around the nation by searching by Hospital name, City, Zip Code, State/Territory or by County and based on the following kinds of information/data:**

- How well doctors and nurses communicate with patients and how well they manage the patient's pain.

- How often hospitals give the recommended treatments that are known to get the best results. For example, people who are having a heart attack should get certain drugs called beta blockers within 24 hours of arriving at the hospital, as studies have shown this to be most effective, or if one is having surgery they are given an antibiotic at the right time before surgery so they have less risk of infection.
- How many people with Medicare have had certain procedures or have been treated for certain illnesses.
- What Medicare pays a hospital (on average) when it does certain procedures or treats certain illnesses.
- How satisfied are people with response times, when patients press their call button for help; or how often does hospital staff give explanations about medicines before giving them to their patients; or how often does staff give information to their patients about what to do during their recovery at home.

After looking on this site at some of the results of the new patient satisfaction survey information, and comparing hospitals side by side, you can look on the right hand side of the page, under “Learn More” where you will find information on:

- Learn More about Hospital Process of Care Measures
- Learn More about Hospital Outcome of Care Measures
- Learn More about the Survey of Patients' Hospital Experiences
- Learn More about Medicare Payment and Volume

And, there's even more on Hospital Compare. Make the most of your search by using all the information on Hospital Compare like the following:

- Features like whether their hospital is accredited.
- A checklist to help you compare up to three hospitals at one time.
- Your rights as a hospital patient.
- Information on how to report a complaint about the quality of your hospital care.
- Other Medicare publications.
- Links to related websites.

It is the expectation of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mike Leavitt that hospitals all over America will be looking at how they compare and developing strategies for improvement. People want to provide quality, but they need to know how they compare as a measure. The release of this data and its continual improvement will spur improvement.

To read the latest press release, please visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/news/> and choose press releases, and the release titled: “New Web Site Helps Patients Shop for Hospital Care Based On Quality and Price, CMS Web Site Features Updated and More Robust Information to Help Consumers with Their Health Care Choices.”

As always, if you have a question(s) about any Medicare topic, you can call 1-800-Medicare, which is, 1-800-633-4227, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.