



MAKING MEDICARE MAKE SENSE

Answers To Some of The Most Commonly Asked Medicare Questions

Q: What is the *Nursing Home Compare Five-Star Quality Rating System* that was Announced in December?

A: For the first time in the history of Medicare and Medicaid, the federal government has rated the nation's 15,800 nursing homes based on the quality of care they provide. The system assigns five stars to the top performing facilities, down to one star for poor performers.

Each nursing home is evaluated in three areas critical to assessing quality of care: how the home has scored on the most recent three-years of health inspections, how it performs on quality measures and its staffing levels. Each area is given a score of one-to-five stars, plus an overall star rating.

The ratings for each nursing home that participates in Medicare and Medicaid can be viewed by visiting www.medicare.gov/nhcompare or by calling 1-800-Medicare, 1-800-633-4227. Since the distribution of overall star ratings is not fixed; the number of nursing homes that have one-star ratings or five-star ratings will change over time. CMS expects the distribution to shift towards a higher number of stars over time, as facilities take quality improvement actions.

CMS currently updates the inspection data on *Nursing Home Compare* on a monthly basis and updates the quality measures on a quarterly basis. Data for the *Five-Star Quality Rating System* will be updated on the same schedule.

Making a decision about long-term care is difficult for any family. The ratings, as well as the other tools on *Nursing Home Compare*, provide a first-step for evaluating long-term care options for your loved ones.

First launched in 1998, the *Nursing Home Compare* Web site is designed to help consumers with this difficult task. The introduction of the new *Five-Star Quality Rating System* takes the wealth of information already on the site and summarizes it in a more user-friendly format. The ratings are not meant as a substitute for other actions families must take such as consulting their physician and visiting homes in their area.

Families should also use the information they find on *Nursing Home Compare* to begin a conversation with the nursing facility administrator about plans to improve care in areas of concern. The overarching goal of the new rating system on *Nursing*

Home Compare and all quality initiatives is to provide unbiased information for the public on key measures surrounding quality of care. Through public reporting and increased awareness by consumers, facilities will continue to advance the quality of the care they provide, resulting in better health outcomes for all.

Approximately, three million elderly and Americans with disabilities rely on nursing home care annually (about 1.5 million reside in nursing homes at any one time). This is an extraordinarily fragile and vulnerable population. They – and their family members – must be able to count on nursing homes to provide reliable, high quality care. The new *Five-Star Quality Rating System* gives families an objective tool for evaluating that care.

Nursing Home Compare is part of a larger effort by Medicare and Medicaid to improve the quality of healthcare in America by arming consumers with the information needed to make informed decisions.