



## MAKING MEDICARE MAKE SENSE

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

**Q:** Medicare recently announced new information on their *Hospital Compare* website that includes how frequently patients return to the hospital after being discharged and additional data on mortality rates. What is this resourceful information, and why should I compare hospitals?

**A:** On July 9, 2009, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), unveiled important new information on their *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 frequently patients return to a hospital after being discharged, a possible indicator of how well the facility did the first time around.

Today, on average, 1 in 5 Medicare beneficiaries who are discharged from a hospital will re-enter the hospital within a month. Reducing the rate of hospital readmissions to improve quality and achieve savings are key components of the current administration's health care reform agenda.

Research has shown that hospital readmissions are reducing the quality of health care while increasing hospital costs. *Hospital Compare* data show that for patients admitted to a hospital for heart attack treatment, 19.9 percent of them will return to the hospital within 30 days, 24.5 percent of patients admitted for heart failure will return to the hospital within 30 days and 18.2 percent of patients admitted for pneumonia will return to the hospital within 30 days.

Also, since 2007, CMS has been displaying on *Hospital Compare*, one year of claims data on mortality rates for heart attack and heart failure. In 2008 pneumonia mortality rates were added to the web site.

On July 9, besides adding the readmission rate data, CMS added 3 full years of claims data on mortality rates for heart attack, heart failure and pneumonia. More data gives a clearer picture of the quality of care delivered at different hospitals over time, which ultimately increases the value of CMS' mortality information to hospital patients, health care payers, employers, policymakers, and other health care stakeholders.

*Hospital Compare* also includes ten measures that capture patient satisfaction with hospital care through actual surveys of patients after discharge. As well, Hospital Compare shows what Medicare pays for selected hospital procedures.

Public reporting of these and other measures is intended to empower patients and their families with information they need to engage their local hospitals and physicians in active discussions about quality of care. CMS believes that all hospitals, regardless of their readmission and mortality rates should use the data available in these free, detailed reports to find ways to continually improve the care they deliver.

The information contained on *Hospital Compare* is available for consumers to use in making health care decisions; although, consumers should gather information from multiple sources when choosing a hospital and not view any one process or outcome measure on *Hospital Compare* as a tool to “shop” for a hospital. For example, patients and caregivers could use the website to help them discuss plans of care with their trusted health care providers. In an emergency situation, patients should always go to the nearest, most easily accessible facility.

Consumers have been able to rely on *Hospital Compare* since 2005 to provide information about the quality of care provided in over 4,700 of America’s acute-care hospitals. In 2008 alone, the Hospital Compare website had over 18 million page views, and has received about 1 million page views each month of 2009 so far.

For questions, call 1-800-Medicare, which is 1-800-633-4227 or log onto [www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov), or [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

###