Home Health Compare Overview

The web site Home Health Compare is one of the central features of the Home Health Quality Initiative. Its goal is to provide quality of care information to consumers to help them make more informed decisions when choosing a home health care provider. The Home Health Quality Initiative is part of an ongoing Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) effort that also focuses on improving the quality of care in nursing homes and hospitals. Public reporting is also intended to stimulate and support providers and clinicians to improve the quality of care provided.

Home Health Compare is one of a number of search tools and other valuable information available at the public Medicare web site, http://www.medicare.gov/. Consumers can search for Medicare-certified home health agencies by selecting a state and entering a county or zip code. The result is a list of agencies with addresses and phone numbers as well as the Medicare-covered services the agencies offer, the initial date of Medicare certification, and type of ownership. The search function is based on the zip code entered for OASIS item M0060, and finds any agency that provided service in the area specified within the last year. Agencies are listed in alphabetical order and can be sorted to list the agencies by the number of episodes in the selected area from largest to smallest.

Once agencies are located in the search, consumers can view data on 11 quality measures that provide information about how well the home health agency provides care for some of their patients. Consumers

are told that while a patient's health condition (such as heart disease or diabetes) may not be expected to improve, the patient can often be expected to improve in the areas covered by the quality measures.

The 11 quality measures are a subset of the 41 outcomes that comprise the Outcome-Based Quality Improvement (OBQI) reports that are available to home health agencies. Both OBQI outcomes and the quality measures reported on Home Health Compare are calculated from OASIS data; however, the way the information is presented differs. This is because a key feature of Home Health Compare is the ability to see how well the patients of an agency fare on the 11 measures compared to other agencies and to state and national averages.

Following are key points comparing OBQI outcome reports and the quality measures appearing on Home Health Compare:

- The quality measures are presented in "consumer friendly" language.
- Outcome and quality measure rates are computed the same way (for example, based on 12 months of data, numerator, denominator, and inclusion criteria).
- The same risk adjustment models are used (except for pain interfering with activity, which currently is risk adjusted only for public reporting).
- On the OBQI report, the national reference value is based on the agency's predicted outcome rate using the risk model. Therefore, each agency's national reference value is different. For public reporting, the national reference value is not risk-adjusted, so it does not change. This was done in order for consumers to be able to compare performance across agencies in relation to constant national and state references.
- For publicly reported measures, the agency value is risk-adjusted. On the OBQI report, the agency's observed outcome rate is not risk-adjusted.
- A risk-adjusted state rate is provided on Home Health Compare.
- Home Health Compare provides the most recently available 12 months of data (no prior time periods). Quality data on the site is updated quarterly, with approximately a two to three month lag time.
- Statistical significance is reported on OBQI reports but is not included on Home Health Compare.

Consumers are encouraged to use the comparative information on home health compare as one tool in an overall strategy to inform themselves in order to select a home care agency. The site also contains brochures and fact sheets on how to choose a home health agency, information on patient rights, and a checklist that will help consumers begin the dialogue with a home health agency.

Home Health Compare was first introduced in May 2003, when Phase I of the Home Health Quality Initiative began, and quality information on home health agencies in eight states, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon, New Mexico, South Carolina and Wisconsin was published. Subsequently, information on all Medicare-certified home health agencies nationwide became available in Fall 2003.

More information on the Home Health Quality Initiative is available at http://cms.hhs.gov/quality/hhqi/.

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