

Summary: Relationship of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) and State Survey Agencies (SSAs)

The following key points are excerpted from the document Home Health Quality Initiative: Relationship of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) and State Survey Agencies (SSAs), February 21, 2003. The complete document can be found at: <http://cms.hhs.gov/quality/hhqi/HHQIRoles.pdf>

For purposes of the Home Health Quality Initiative, QIOs have been given the responsibility to promote awareness and use of publicly reported home health quality measures, and to provide assistance to home health agencies that seek to improve performance.

QIOs will seek to accomplish this by conveying the message that some home health agencies do better than others in regards to quality measures that are important to beneficiaries and their caregivers, and by making available information and assistance to home health providers about how they can achieve better performance.

QIOs will offer assistance to home health agencies working to improve on the OASIS-based quality measures reported in the Outcome Based Quality Improvement reports.

QIOs will serve as non-regulatory partners with home health agencies to facilitate quality improvement. Home health providers work with QIOs on a voluntary basis, and are of course free to use other agents (private consultants, etc) in their improvement efforts. Practitioner-, agency-, or patient-identifiable information that is reported by home health agencies to the QIO is confidential except under very limited circumstances provided for under federal statute and regulations.

The QIO will serve as a clearinghouse of resource materials developed and collected both nationally and statewide.

From CMS' perspective, SSAs and QIOs have distinct missions. QIOs seek to promote improvement and excellence in care. The QIO mission does not include inspection and enforcement around regulatory standards. SSAs conduct quality monitoring surveys to ensure that home health agencies meet regulatory standards. Under State laws and directives, some SSAs have also undertaken activities to promote improvement.

QIOs are not part of the regulatory process. The QIO's purpose is not to identify situations in which enforcement is necessary but rather to assist home health agencies to improve quality using quality improvement principles and techniques.

A working relationship including exchange of information between a home health agency and a QIO does not alter the home health agency's requirement to provide information to the SSA in accordance with existing laws and regulations. A home health agency may not use its participation in QIO activities to shield information from the SSA.

The fact that a home health agency is working with a QIO will not impact the survey process or survey findings. An intervention supported by the QIO and used by a home health agency does not alleviate a home health agency's responsibility if the SSA determines a related deficiency. SSAs will continue to

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perform all of their current survey and certification activities irrespective of an individual home health agency's results on the quality measures and irrespective of whether the home health agency is working with a QIO.

QIOs and SSAs are encouraged to share materials relevant to improvement activities with each other. QIOs and SSAs are encouraged to communicate regularly on all Home Health Quality Initiative-related activities. QIOs and SSAs are encouraged to provide overviews to each other about their organizations and responsibilities.

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MO-03-129-HH December 2003

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