



Press Release

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Medicare Approves Five Star Quality Ratings for Nursing Homes

Denver, CO. Going to a nursing home is one of the most feared life events for older adults. Nursing home residency is usually equated with death and the last days of living. Individuals most often are required to have a roommate. The early thinking by aging specialists was that “roommates and being near someone” would automatically keep people from feeling lonely and isolated. The architectural style of nursing homes forces this living arrangement with little opportunity for privacy and almost never any time for being “alone”; although many people yearn for a few minutes, just to be “by themselves without strangers”.

Recently Medicare approved the Five Star Quality Rating System to help consumers, their families, and caregivers compare nursing homes more easily and help identify areas for consumers to ask questions. Nursing home ratings are taken from health inspections, staffing patterns, and quality measures.

Nursing homes are required to meet 180 regulatory standards to be deficient free. These standards range from proper management of medications, protecting residents from physical or mental abuse and inadequate care, to the safe storage and preparation of food. Using the regulatory standards, the state inspection team looks at many aspects of life in the nursing home including the care of residents and the processes used to give that care; how the staff and residents interact, and the nursing home environment. The nursing home is also required to meet fire safety standards.

A major concern of nursing home residents is the quality of care. Residents often must wait for long periods of time to have a call light answered to go to the bathroom or to be moved to a new position to reduce pain. Other residents are placed in wheelchairs with little support for their head and arms as the wheelchair is not specifically designed to meet their body.

But, currently there are no federal standards for the best nursing home staffing levels. However, the nursing home must have at least one registered nurse for at least 8 straight hours a day, 7 days a week, and either an registered nurse or licensed practical nurse on duty 24 hours per day. Nursing homes are required to report over a two-week period the number of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and certified nursing assistants. Medicare uses this information to calculate the staffing hours per resident per day by the average amount of hours worked divided by the total number of

residents. It does not necessarily show the number of nursing staff present at any given time, or reflect the amount of care given to any one resident.

Nursing homes regularly collect assessment information on all their residents using a form called the Minimum Data Set to determine quality of care. The information collected includes the residents' health, physical functioning, mental status, and general well being. Nursing homes self-report this information to Medicare. Specifically this information includes such things as flu shots, whether residents are in pain or if they are losing weight.

Using this data, all Medicare certified nursing homes in the country are rated using The Five Star Quality Rating System. The ratings are available at www.medicare.gov under "Nursing Home Compare". Three stars is average, with five stars being much above average, and one star rating being much below average. Nursing homes that have very high deficiencies and continue to have frequent complaints are cited as a Special Focus Facility and receive more frequent inspections.

Although the quality rating system is no substitute for visiting the nursing home, it provides an indicator of the care that is provided. A review of the Colorado facilities indicates that many of the facilities that accept Medicaid have ratings above average. Similarly facilities in some rural areas have above average ratings while others have below average ratings.

You can obtain information on the quality ratings by visiting the nursing home, calling the local ombudsman, or contacting the Colorado Department of Health at 303-692-2800. For more information, call 303-333-3482.

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