

New initiative aims to improve home health care

By Jay A. Gold, MD, JD, MPH, and Shanin Pepple

Approximately 35,000 elderly and disabled Wisconsinites receive care from the state's 118 Medicare-certified home health agencies annually. The quality of home care is of great importance to physicians, as it helps determine whether or not your decisions about what your patients need will be carried out appropriately once they leave the hospital or office.

The Home Health Quality Initiative (HHQI) aims to improve the quality of care given to those who use home health care services. By providing information about health care quality to consumers and the home health industry, the HHQI is designed to stimulate and support providers and clinicians to improve the quality of health care. Currently, Wisconsin is one of eight states chosen by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to participate in the first phase of HHQI. The national roll-out will occur this fall.

As part of HHQI Phase I, consumers can view quality measurement data for all Medicare-certified home health agencies in the state on

the "Home Health Compare" website (www.medicare.gov).

Working with input from measurement experts, the United States Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and a diverse group of home health industry stakeholders, CMS identified appropriate quality measures (see box) that consumers can use to compare home health agencies. The 11 quality measures are a subset of a larger set of Outcomes and Assessment Information Set (OASIS) outcome measures.

CMS has for some time required home health agencies to submit OASIS data for reimbursement. The OASIS is a group of data items developed to enable rigorous and systematic measurement of patient home health care outcomes. Outcomes have been defined in many ways, but those derived from OASIS items have a very specific definition: they measure changes in a patient's health status between two or more time points.

Another goal of HHQI is to improve the home health quality of care statewide through the Outcomes Based Quality Improvement (OBQI) method. CMS developed OBQI as a way to use OASIS data for quality improvement. Under OBQI, quality is measured against the ultimate yardstick—patient outcomes. Using OASIS data allows the home health agency to evaluate

HHQI Quality Measures

- Acute care hospitalization
- Improvement in ambulation/locomotion
- Improvement in bathing
- Improvement in management of oral medications
- Improvement in transferring
- Improvement in upper body dressing
- Improvement in toileting
- Improvement in pain interfering with activity
- Stabilization in bathing
- Improvement in confusion frequency
- Any emergent care provided

its efforts at quality of care improvement over time. The outcome reports furnished from the OASIS dataset also enable the agency to benchmark its outcomes against national averages.

As the quality improvement organization for Wisconsin, MetaStar, Inc. is working with local home health agencies to improve their quality of care and help consumers better use the quality performance data. MetaStar is working with local home health agencies to interpret OASIS outcome reports, identify successes and opportunities for improvement, develop an action plan and identify evidence-based best practices. MetaStar also provides educational materials and other technical assistance.

For more information on HHQI, contact Diane Peters, vice president of long term care, MetaStar, at 800.362.2320 or e-mail dpeters@metastar.com.

Authors are with MetaStar, Inc. Doctor Gold is senior vice president and principal clinical coordinator; Pepple is a communications specialist. This material was prepared by MetaStar, Inc., the Quality Improvement Organization for Wisconsin, under a contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The contents presented do not necessarily reflect CMS policy.



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