

# The Next Quality Level

*The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services joins providers, long term care groups, and others to promote quality improvement.*

**Q**UALITY HEALTH CARE ISN'T AN abstract concept. Quality is about the kind of care that does not cause avoidable suffering or unnecessary complications and gets the right care to every patient every time.

Nursing home providers have been on the leading edge of this quality movement. Long before hospitals, doctors, home health providers, pharmacies, dialysis facilities, and others came to the table, the nursing home industry was out front with Quality First—a volunteer effort to elevate quality and accountability.

When the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) launched the National Nursing Home Quality Initiative (NHQI) back in 2001, we did this as partners.

## The Program

Together we developed a starter set of eight measures to reflect quality care in nursing homes. They dealt with short-term and long-term issues familiar to anyone who provides care for frail elderly or disabled people in a nursing home. The starter set included measures for how well a caregiver managed residents' pain, whether or not residents were physically restrained, if residents deteriorated in functional ability, and the percentage of residents with pressure sores.

We set the bar high. All of the measures were based on the best research available; all were endorsed by the National Quality Forum (NQF), the gold standard in measuring quality. They had to meet four criteria:

- Important to consumers;

## Founding Members

**A** very wide array of organizations and people who care very deeply about quality of life in the nation's nursing homes founded Advancing Excellence. They include the American Health Care Association, the Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care, the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, the American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordinators, the American College of Health Care Administrators, the American Medical Directors Association, the National Association of Health Care Assistants, the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, the National Commission for Quality Long-Term Care, the Commonwealth Fund, the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, the QIOs, and CMS.



- Accurate (reliable, valid, and risk-adjusted);
- Able to compare differences between facilities; and
- Subject to improvement with the delivery of high-quality care.

One other important precondition: The quality measures had to be dynamic and refined on a continuous basis as part of CMS' ongoing commitment to quality.

Given the rigor of the initiative's design and the fact that Medicare's quality improvement organizations (QIOs) took on the task of working directly with nursing homes, it shouldn't come as any surprise that just five years later, rates of restraints, pressure ulcers, and other serious outcomes have declined, and the rate of influenza immunizations has improved.

Now with a total of 19 quality measures in the set, which you will find listed on the Nursing Home Compare Web site at [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov), we've arrived at the next level and a new campaign.

## Coming Together For Quality

Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes launched last September and will run for two years. It builds on the 2001 Quality First campaign and stresses the essential connection between quality, adequate payment for services, and financial stability.

We commend the thousands of facilities that have already signed up for the campaign by going to [www.nhqualitycampaign.org](http://www.nhqualitycampaign.org). We hope you will join this new effort as well.

Advancing Excellence makes a seamless transition between the work that has already been accomplished with NHQI and Quality First. Advancing Excellence not only maintains the national commitment to improving nursing home quality of care, it takes it

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to an even higher level by incorporating the notion of benchmarking.

## Goals Are Measurable

The coalition has agreed to focus on eight measurable goals to improve quality at the national level, all of which are important to consumers and will help advance the delivery of high-quality care:

1. Reducing high-risk pressure ulcers;
2. Reducing the use of daily physical restraints;
3. Improving pain management for longer term nursing home residents;
4. Improving pain management for short-stay, post-acute nursing home residents;
5. Establishing individual targets for improving quality;
6. Assessing resident and family satisfaction with the quality of care;
7. Increasing staff retention; and
8. Improving consistent assignment of nursing home staff, so that residents regularly receive care from the same caregivers.

The first four goals involve NQF-endorsed measures currently reported as part of Nursing Home Compare.

The fifth goal of setting targets for quality improvement requires providers to take ownership of quality improvement in key clinical measures. It's a key part of creating an expectation and a culture of excellence.

The sixth goal, resident and family satisfaction, reflects the centrality of the resident in nursing homes' quality improvement. Achieving a high level of resident and family experience of care should be and will be a key goal of quality improvement.

The last two goals focus on staff—reducing staff turnover and increasing the consistent assignment of nursing home staff to residents. These are proven ways to improve quality, reduce complications, and avoid preventable long term care costs.

In every one of its eight goals, Advancing Excellence stresses mean-

ingful, measurable action. It requires a firm commitment on the part of stakeholders to achieve improvement in all of these dimensions. It also demands a commitment to collect and assess progress using regularly measured data.

## The Need To Get Involved

The most significant change between Advancing Excellence and prior efforts is its emphasis on measurable goals,

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setting numerical targets, and agreeing to achieve absolute benchmarks. No one has ever had the courage to do this before.

That is why it is so critical for nursing home care providers to join this effort. Measures must reflect the reality of providers' experience, especially as we move to a performance-based payment system. We don't want to make pay for performance only about payment—it's about doing the right thing. It's about proving value and quality to consumers.

We want to support providers who deliver better care. That way, we are not wasting money on ineffective, duplicative services, medical errors, and preventable complications—we are getting better care at lower cost.

As part of Advancing Excellence, providers can set targets for improvement. You can customize the degree of improvement you achieve with the resources you have. Click on the link to the Setting Targets-Achieving Results Web site, "STAR" for short, at [www.nhqi-star.org/](http://www.nhqi-star.org/). The site will walk

you through the process of setting targets for various quality measures.

Nursing home providers can use the STAR site to view quality measures, select appropriate targets, and track their progress over time.

In addition, you can compare your performance against the top 10 percent of nursing homes nationwide, on the Achievable Benchmarks of Care measures. Facilities can select targets based on quality measure scores or on the scores of high-performing peers. For example, you can base your choice of targets on state averages, national averages, or percentile rankings.

Furthermore, everyone can participate in the effort and track their progress. Consumers—particularly the families of nursing home residents—can go to the Web site and sign up to be a participant in the campaign. Engaging residents and their families in improving nursing home quality is probably the most powerful force for driving further improvement. Greater resident and family engagement on quality is one of the new campaign's most important goals.

## The Role Of Survey

We have not abandoned our commitment to improving the survey and certification process. In fact, we're making the maximum effort permitted by the resources provided by Congress. Last September we released the 2007 edition of CMS' Action Plan for (Further Improvement of) Nursing Home Quality. The Action Plan spells out in detail many of our initiatives and describes our efforts to coordinate the work of many parts of CMS in a comprehensive strategy. Find the Action Plan on our Web site at [www.cms.hhs.gov/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/02\\_Hot%20Topics.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/02_Hot%20Topics.asp#TopOfPage).

All nursing homes should meet standards for safety and patient well-being, and there is more we can do to use our survey and certification oversight in conjunction with these new quality

improvement initiatives. Quality measurement and quality improvement, buttressed by effective survey and certification, are key elements of our overall strategy to ensure safe and effective nursing home care.

We encourage you to join Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes. Nothing like this has ever been done before in nursing home care, on this scale and with this breadth of commitment. Many quality improvement materials are available on the Web at [www.MedQIC.org](http://www.MedQIC.org) as well as the campaign Web site.

The state QIOs also can provide you with support. All QIOs' names, addresses, and contact information are listed on the MedQIC Web site. CMS will not have access to campaign data or individual provider information except what is already available on Nursing Home Compare and the aggregate data results that will be posted to the campaign quarterly.

### **The Right Thing To Do**

This campaign is a win for everyone. As nursing home providers, you want these measures to add value to what you do every day. Especially with a nursing home value-based purchasing demonstration on the horizon, CMS needs your input. The demonstration will assess the performance of participating nursing homes based on selected quality measures, then make additional payments to homes with superior performance.

Finally, this is simply the right thing to do. In all of our programs, CMS is moving toward a system of person-centered care, with all of our programs geared toward promoting high-quality care for each patient every time—not just paying more for more services without a thought to quality or impact on patient health.

Quality measurement has worked in nursing homes. The fact that it has is a tribute to your leadership and to the collaboration built over the years among Quality First participants, the

QIOs, state survey activities, and others. The commitment to raising quality, and the innovative partnerships we've created together through NHQI, Quality First, and Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes will continue long after this campaign is over.

Collaborating to measure quality of long term care, report it, support it, and improve it—that's the best path to a high-quality, patient-centered, provider-friendly system that everyone can afford.

At CMS, we look forward to working with you to achieve it. ■