



## CMA Weekly Alert - May 5, 2005

### CMS TO EXCLUDE QUESTIONABLE NURSE STAFFING DATA

Most advocates and researchers agree that nurse staffing is the single most critical factor determining nursing home quality. Beginning this month, *Nursing Home Compare*, the online service of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that provides facility-specific information about nursing homes, will *exclude* certain facilities' nurse staffing data.

CMS is rightly concerned about the accuracy of its data reporting. At present, CMS' *Nursing Home Compare* disseminates self-reported nurse staffing information that is collected at the time of the annual survey. CMS has long-recognized that this unedited and unverified information is flawed and now admits that *Nursing Home Compare* overstates some facilities' actual staffing. For example, some facilities' practice of reporting nurse staffing levels for *all* beds while reporting residents for the smaller number of Medicare- or Medicaid-*certified* beds leads to inflated staffing ratios.

Beginning in late April, as part of its effort to improve the accuracy of information on *Nursing Home Compare*, CMS will send state survey agencies a list of facilities whose staffing data will be excluded. After state agencies verify that the data submitted by facilities have been correctly inputted, or after correcting any errors, they will send the forms to facilities to confirm or correct the information. Facilities will be required to provide additional information as proof of staffing; affirming the accuracy of data will not be sufficient.

Nationwide, approximately 7% of nursing facilities will have their staffing data excluded from *Nursing Home Compare*; another 8% of facilities will have their staffing levels altered. In some states, however, CMS predicts that as many as one-third of all facilities will have their staffing data excluded or altered.

CMS anticipates that the initial sets of audits of staffing data will be completed by June 30, 2005. Similar edits of staffing data will continue on a monthly basis.

*Nursing Home Compare* is available through the Medicare website at <http://www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/Home.asp?version=alternate&browser=IE%7C6%7CWinXP&language=English&defaultstatus=0&pagelist=Home>. The CMS memorandum, "Nursing Homes – Changes to Staffing Data on the Nursing Home Compare Website," S&C-045-24 (April 14, 2005), is available at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicaid/survey-cert/sc0524.pdf>.

*If you have further questions on this topic, please contact Toby S. Edelman ([tedelman@medicareadvocacy.org](mailto:tedelman@medicareadvocacy.org)) in the Center for Medicare Advocacy's Washington, DC office at (202) 216-0028.*