

## Quality of care provided to Medicare beneficiaries

**ISSUE:** What is the quality of care provided to Medicare beneficiaries? Is it getting better or worse over time? Does it differ depending on the setting and the measure of quality? How should Medicare work to improve quality? Answering these questions requires learning more about the quality of care provided to Medicare beneficiaries.

**KEY POINTS:** The data presented here are part of the information that we anticipate including in a chapter on quality in the March report. The chapter will include discussion from other sources on hospitals and physicians as well as information on other settings, such as skilled nursing facilities and home health agencies. In the analyses presented here, we applied quality indicators developed by AHRQ to Medicare claims and used a survey administered by CMS to measure indicators of:

- Mortality in hospitals,
- Rates of adverse events in hospitals,
- The prevalence of admissions for ambulatory care sensitive conditions, and
- Beneficiary perception of their quality of care.

These analyses show that on some measures quality appears to be improving, and on others, getting worse.

- Rates of in-hospital mortality are decreasing for most conditions and procedures, although at a lower rate when measured by 30-day mortality.
- Medicare beneficiaries are experiencing adverse events in hospitals at a higher rate in 2002 than they did in 1995. While the rate of occurrence of most adverse events is small, these events affect a large number of beneficiaries in any given year.
- In general, a large and growing number of beneficiaries are being admitted to the hospital for conditions for which better outpatient care might have prevented the need for the hospitalization (ambulatory care sensitive conditions).
- While it appears that beneficiaries are not all receiving optimal ambulatory care, they are generally very satisfied with the quality of the care they receive from their health providers.

**ACTION:** The Commission should consider what the data show about the quality of care provided to Medicare beneficiaries and strategies to improve quality. It may help the Commission identify settings or problems of particular interest for further research or policy, such as incentives for quality improvement.

**STAFF CONTACT:** Karen Milgate (202-220-3738), Sharon Cheng (202-220-3712), David Glass (202-220-3743), and Sarah Lowery (202-220-3754)