

Jonathan Rosenfeld's Nursing Homes Abuse Blog

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One year after the implementation of the Medicare nursing home rating system, where do we stand?



Hard to believe, but its been almost a year since Medicare unveiled [Nursing Home Compare](#). Praised or criticized, most agencies that represent nursing home operators or consumers have at least come to accept it as a permanent fixture for families looking for information on facilities.

If you haven't heard, Nursing Home Compare uses a five-star rating system (5 stars = much above average, 1 star = much below average) to evaluate approximately 15,700 nursing homes across the

country that receive government funding. Centers for Medicare Services (CMS) collects data and rates each facility based on standardized categories such as: staffing levels, incidence of bed sores, fire safety and health inspections conducted by state surveyors.

The inherent variances that accompany how data is collected and differences among individual states method of reporting, does complicate the standardized rating process. Consequently, it can be difficult to generalize and say that all facilities within a particular category are good or bad, but the ratings do help to provide some individuals and families quickly collect information from a variety of facilities in important categories.

An article from [Scripps News](#), further demonstrates the value of the rating system. After reviewing the data, a Scripps analysis made the following particularly helpful conclusions:

- Facilities operated by for-profit organizations tended to have lower ratings than not-for-profit institutions;
- Institutions with higher nurse-to-patient ratios generally had higher ratings;
- Long-term care facilities with more than 100 beds tended to have lower scores for all categories;

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- Nursing homes located in Southern states generally had lower ratings, while Northeastern facilities tended to achieve higher scores; and
- Slightly more than 20% of U.S. nursing homes regularly received the lowest ratings, while 12% to 13% received the highest score.

According to Thomas Hamilton, the director of the survey and certification group at CMS and leader of the design team for the Nursing Home Compare website, views the site as a starting point for families.

"Our hope is that families will use the system to look at nursing homes near where they live and compare quality ratings within their state. But they should consider it only a starting point." "Once they pare down the list, they should print out the information and take it with them when they visit the families and other people who might be familiar with the home."

I agree that Nursing Home Compare can be a valuable part in selecting a facility that meets the needs of the individual. However, no website-- however detailed-- can take the place of a visit to the facility so the family can see for themselves what the facility is like. I strongly urge, family members to visit facilities at least two times-- one announced visit and one unannounced visit before making a determination.

Secondly, we can only hope that the public ratings will act as an incentive for poorly performing facilities to improve their care. Just as the public will likely shy away from one-starred facilities, what type of nursing home operator really wants to be publicly known as a poorly performing facility?

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