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Contact: Sheila Strand, Director of Communication

Phone: 202-547-7424 scs@nahc.org

Home Health Compare Shares Data With Consumers

Washington, DC – Helping Americans find the highest quality health care is always a good thing, said Val J. Halamandaris, president of the National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC). In this connection, Halamandaris said the federal government’s first efforts to produce a data-based checkpoint called *Home Health Compare* “appears to be a step in the right direction.”

“We can never say enough that the patient and his or her needs come first in home care,” Halamandaris said. “Creating a viable, valid way for average citizens to find the perfect home care agency for them is challenging. Home care is a complex mix of skilled, professional medical care and personal support. Determining the right combination of useful information will require ongoing input.”

Home Health Compare was spearheaded by Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Tom Scully. The national program follows an eight-state pilot earlier this year.

More than 2.222 million Americans receive Medicare-reimbursed home health services... The demand for home-delivered health care is projected to grow exponentially with the advent of an aging population.

NAHC is the world’s largest trade association advocating for home care and hospice. The association, founded in 1982, encourages development and delivery of the highest quality medical, social and supportive services to the nation’s frail, disabled and aged. For more information, contact NAHC at 202-547-7424, or go to www.nahc.org

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BACKGROUND ON HOME HEALTH COMPARE

Home Health Compare is a quality measurement initiative spearheaded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and its Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The data relates only to Medicare-certified home health care providers.

Eleven quality measures are taken into account as a way to help consumers and their families choose the best home health agency for their needs. The information also allows agencies to examine their care outcomes based on state and national averages so they can target potential areas for improvement.

Newspapers around the country will list 3 of those 11 measures for a sampling of the approximately 7,000 Medicare-certified home health agencies. This national rollout follows an eight-state pilot program launched in April 2003 by CMS.

Regularly updated information will be easily accessible to consumers and their families by calling Medicare's toll-free help line at 1-800-633-4227, or by visiting the government's *Home Health Compare* website at <http://www.medicare.gov/HHCompare/Home.asp>.

The 11 quality measures include:

- Four measures related to mobility, such as getting better at walking, getting in and out of bed, getting to and from the toilet, and experiencing less pain when moving;
- Four measures related to meeting basic daily needs, such as getting better at dressing, getting better at bathing, maintaining bathing capability, and taking oral medications;
- Two measures related to medical emergencies, such as being admitted to the hospital and requiring unplanned medical care;
- One measure related to improvement in mental health status, such as being confused less often.

Quality measures used in the *Home Health Compare* are based on information collected from the CMS-mandated Outcome and Assessment Information Set (OASIS). OASIS data is collected by home health agencies at various points during care. The measures are risk adjusted for factor differences, such as home health agencies that admit more difficult and complex care patients. Adjusting for risk allows for a more accurate comparison.

As part of this effort, Medicare's Quality Improvement Organizations (QIO's) (formerly known as Peer Review Organizations) have been working with home health agencies to improve quality of care. QIO's will help consumers understand and effectively use *Home Health Compare* data. To locate each state's QIO, visit the American Health Quality Association at www.ahqa.org and click on the locator.