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**Consumers Applaud Broader Access to Quality Information
on Home Health Care Services**

Washington, DC – Brian Lindberg of the Consumer Coalition for Quality Health Care joined Quality Improvement Organizations and home health care industry representatives in issuing a strong endorsement of providing more data on home health quality to the public. A Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) initiative, which publicly reports on the quality of care provided by individual home health agencies, will be expanded from eight states to all states beginning on November 3, 2003.

Brian Lindberg said that while millions of older and disabled Americans use home health care agencies for a variety of services, such as assistance with bathing, toileting, walking, taking medications, and controlling pain, few consumers or their families have access to good information on the quality of the home health agencies that they use. Accurate information on the quality of this care should be available to all consumers.

“One of the founding principles of the Consumer Coalition is that consumers should be given information on the quality of care available so that they are able to make meaningful choices between providers. The CMS home health care quality initiative, along with CMS’s other initiatives for nursing homes and hospitals, gets us one step closer to the day when consumers will routinely use report cards on quality as one of the factors when weighing their health care decisions.”

The Coalition supports the public release of quality data even if many consumers choose not to use the information or are not aware of it. Lindberg stated that there is good evidence that health care providers respond to the public reporting of quality data by attempting to improve their ranking and fix quality problems. “When we collect data and share it with providers they have an opportunity to improve. If they know others are looking at the data, the incentive is even greater. With QIOs available to assist home health agencies in their work to improve, I think we have a formula that begins to serve consumers’ interests well.”

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Unfortunately, many consumers assume good technical care and the clinical competence of the providers they use, but performance is highly variable. Accurate information published by CMS will enable consumers to compare home health agencies on quality measures and better inform their decision-making process. Consumers will be able to see which agencies had the best record of helping patients improve their ability to get out of bed, dress, bath, get to and from the toilet, and which agencies have better results in treating pain and preventing hospitalization.

Consumers should know that they have the right to choose which home health agency they use. We have worked with the national association for QIOs (The American Health Quality Association) and the home health care industry representatives to provide additional information and tools for consumers to consider when they face these difficult decisions. The CMS initiative will add to those tools and we are hopeful that the set of measures will be expanded in the near future so that consumers will have even more information about each agency.

The Consumer Coalition for Quality Health Care was formed in 1993. The Coalition is a national, non-profit membership organization comprised of a diverse group of health care and consumer organizations representing more than 30 million Americans. The Coalition advocates for programs and policies that address the critical need for a health care system that provides meaningful choices and information, consumer participation, grievance and appeals rights, consumer advocacy, and independent quality oversight and improvement.

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