

# Will the Government Make Patient Satisfaction Surveys Mandatory?

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In 2002 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) began an initiative that would mandate patient satisfaction surveys in hospitals and publicly disclose the findings. CMS is currently creating patient satisfaction surveys and quality measurements for hospitals similar to ones it has developed for other provider groups, such as nursing homes. Ultimately, CMS would like to establish a method to correlate hospital payments to quality performance.



Although CMS plans to ease hospitals into standardized quality measurements as part of a voluntary initiative schedule to be launched in 2003, reporting is expected to become mandatory within a few years. CMS has stated that public reporting of hospital patient satisfaction surveys is a priority and has requested that AHRQ develop questions for a standardized survey slated to be ready early in 2003.

Currently, this CMS/AHRQ initiative (the Hospital-CAHPS® patient experience project) is looking into mandating either survey methodology or an entire survey. If this happens, hospitals across the country would be required to use the same survey methodology, the same survey, or some combination of the two.

Many hospitals remain unaware of the Hospital-CAHPS patient experience project—even after AHRQ published its Call for Measures in the July 24, 2002, *Federal Register*. However, the initiative will mean sweeping changes for all hospitals. Because CMS has expressed interest in correlating quality performance and hospital

payments, the possibility exists that scores on this patient satisfaction survey could affect Medicare and Medicaid payments in the future.

While too early in the process to determine what the mandate will be, we need to ensure that this initiative does not become an undue burden on hospitals and health care providers.

On Nov. 18, 2002, representatives from CMS and AHRQ met with survey vendors at CMS' headquarters in Baltimore, Md., seeking input about the Hospital-CAHPS patient experience project. AHRQ and CMS fielded questions about the status of the project and plans for pilot testing the measurement instrument once it is developed. AHRQ will hold a series of public meetings to identify the issues, concerns, and interests of the health care community.

Once consensus on the national standard has been reached, it will be placed in the public domain and undergo instrument testing. AHRQ will then develop a process for implementing the standard nationwide, including information related to data collection, analysis, and public reporting. Finally, federal rules requiring the use of the standard will be published.

Find out what this national standard measurement tool will mean to your cancer program by logging onto [www.ahrq.gov/qual/cahpsix.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/cahpsix.htm). Questions regarding the CAHPS initiative can be directed to Charles Darby at [CDarby@ahrq.gov](mailto:CDarby@ahrq.gov) or by phone at 301.594.2050. AHRQ has even created a LISTSERV® to keep the hospital industry informed about the initiative. Instructions on how to subscribe to the LISTSERV are found at the above web site address. ☐

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