

## **Nursing Home Compare & the Five-Star Rating System:**

### **Information for Consumers**

#### **What is Nursing Home Compare?**

Nursing Home Compare is a website that provides information about facilities to help consumers when choosing or monitoring a nursing home. The website is operated by an agency of the federal government called the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Nursing Home Compare includes all nursing homes in the United States that participate in the Medicaid and/or Medicare programs. The website gives consumers information such as the facility's:

- Ownership
- Inspection (survey) results for the past three years
- Staffing levels for nurses, certified nursing assistants, and physical therapists
- Quality Measures. These indicate how a facility is doing in 18 care areas, such as how well it is preventing pressure ulcers (bed sores) or in helping residents to continue to carry out tasks such as getting dressed or getting out of bed.
- Penalties. Actions, such as requiring a nursing home to pay a fine, can be taken when a serious violation of the requirements is found in a facility or the home has not corrected a serious violation.

#### **What is the Five Star Rating System?**

The Five-Star Rating System rates the nursing homes on Nursing Home Compare using a star system that ranges from one star (much below average) to five stars (much above average). The ratings are based on how well a nursing home does in three areas: inspections, staffing levels for nurses and nursing assistants, and quality measures for a limited number of care areas.

A star rating is provided for each of these three areas sources, and then these three ratings are combined to calculate an overall rating.

#### **How should I use Nursing Home Compare and the Five Star Rating System?**

- To choose a nursing home. You can use the information to:
  - Identify nursing homes in the geographic area you're looking at and then narrow down the possibilities by reviewing the information on Nursing Home Compare and the star ratings. Experts say that Nursing Home Compare is most accurate at detecting the best (five-star) and worst (one-star) facilities.
    - Come up with questions to ask the nursing homes you are considering. For instance, if the inspection results show that a nursing home received a serious

*The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (formerly NCCNHR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization founded in 1975 by Elma L. Holder that advocates for quality care and quality of life for consumers in all long-term-care settings.*

violation because it failed to prevent pressure ulcers, ask what the facility is doing to reduce the number of pressure ulcers.

**NOTE:** *After examining a facility on Nursing Home Compare, it is still extremely important to visit the nursing home; talk to residents, families, and others who have experienced the quality of the care it provides; talk with your state or local ombudsman; and ask the nursing home to share its most recent inspection (survey) report with you. It is not advisable to choose a nursing home based solely on information from Nursing Home Compare or the rating system.*

- To monitor a nursing home. You can use the information to:
  - Check out how the nursing home does over time. If there is a change for the worse, such as more violations or less staff – you can:
    - Ask the administrator why these changes are occurring and what the facility is doing to address those problems.
    - Observe your care or a loved one’s care more closely to make sure the problems are not affecting how you or a loved one is doing.

### **What are the Limitations with Nursing Home Compare and the Five-Star Rating System?**

While Nursing Home Compare and the Five-Star Quality Rating System can be a good starting place, consumers need to keep in mind the following limitations:

- The information may be old so the nursing home may have changed since it was posted.
- Inspections: The inspectors are only in the nursing home for a few days. This means you are only getting a “snapshot” of what the facility is like – and a snapshot taken when the facility administration and staff know they are being observed. In addition, the inspectors do not look at the care of all residents; they only look at a sample of residents.
- Staffing levels: This information is reported by the nursing home itself and is not checked for accuracy. The information is based on a two-week period prior to the time of the inspection and does not tell you what staffing is like the rest of the time.
- Quality Measures: The measures come from information that the nursing homes themselves report. Inspectors review this information, but do not check it for accuracy.