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CMS Memo on Changes in Special Focus Facility Program

On March 2, 2017, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released a memo to State Survey Agency (SA) directors addressing changes in procedure for the Special Focus Facility (SFF) program for Fiscal Year 2017.

The memo focuses on: (1) the number of approved SFF slots and candidates for each state, (2) process of the initial selection notice, (3) requirements for graduating from the SFF program, and (4) authority for termination for SFFs.

In the memo, CMS reiterates that each state will continue to have the same number of slots and candidates for the SFF program as mandated on May 1, 2014. However, the initial selection notice for the program now requires the SA to inform a facility in writing of its SFF selection.

The requirements for graduating from the SFF program have also been revised. A facility in the SFF program has to complete two consecutive standard surveys with no deficiencies cited at a scope and severity of "F" or greater (or "G" or greater for the Life Safety Code [LSC] deficiencies) in between those two standard surveys to graduate from the SFF program.

The final change that the memo highlights is the CMS Regional Offices' (RO) authority for termination. The memo states that a RO has complete discretionary authority to terminate a SFF (or any facility) if it significantly compromises the residents' health and safety.