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Hospitals

Hospital Star Ratings Delayed Amid Industry Concerns

The Medicare agency will not release hospital star ratings as expected in July as it continues reviewing industry concerns about changes to the way it determines the ratings.

The ratings, which the agency posts on its Hospital Compare website in July and December, give patients a way to judge the quality of hospitals based on a five-star scale. In May, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services proposed changes to the ratings methodology amid criticism from industry groups and Congress.

The star ratings are now expected to be updated in January 2019, a CMS spokesman told Bloomberg Law June 12.

"CMS made the right call in postponing the July update of star ratings, and we appreciate the agency allowing more time for a fuller analysis of its methodology and measures and to hear from stakeholders, including hospitals and health systems, about concerns found in many preview reports," Tom Nickels, executive vice president of the American Hospital Association in Washington, said in a statement June 12.

Methodology Changes The CMS planned to change how safety measures were weighed in the overall rating. No actual changes were made to the methodology

between the last public release of the star ratings in December 2017 and May 2018, according to the CMS spokesman. There were, however, changes made to the underlying measures used to calculate the ratings.

The star ratings will include three new measures; hospital return days for pneumonia patients, percentage of patients who received appropriate care for severe sepsis and septic shock, and average time patients spent in the emergency department before going home.

A September 2016 analysis by Bloomberg Law found that hospitals in low-income counties tend to score poorly on quality measures, which underscores that beneficiary demographics are not accounted for in hospital ratings.

"Reviews of July preview reports show large shifts in overall hospital star ratings from December 2017 to July 2018. These changes have created confusion and raised new questions about the reliability and validity of the methodology used to calculate these ratings," Bruce Siegel, president and CEO of America's Essential Hospitals in Washington, said in a statement June 12. "We remain deeply concerned the star ratings could do more harm than good in their current form."

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