

Patient Harm Greatest in Long-Term Care Hospitals, Watchdog Says

By Shira Stein

Posted Dec. 6, 2018, 12:53 PM

- Almost half of Medicare patients experience harm during long-term stays
- CMS already working on improving

Almost half of Medicare patients in long-term care hospitals experienced harm during their stays, and over half of those events were preventable, a federal watchdog said.

These inpatient hospitals treat patients who are very ill—often with several acute and/or chronic conditions—and require care for an extended period.

The report by the HHS Office of Inspector General looked at 587 patients admitted to long-term care hospitals in March 2014 and found 21 percent experienced “adverse events” and 25 percent experienced “temporary harm events.” Adverse events include events that prolong a stay, require life-saving intervention, result in permanent harm, and contribute to death. Temporary harm events are those that require intervention, but don’t cause lasting harm.

The findings show that long-term care hospitals have the highest rate of patients experiencing harm. The OIG found in other studies that harm rates are lower in skilled nursing facilities (33 percent), rehabilitation hospitals (29 percent), and hospitals (27 percent).

The OIG qualified its findings by pointing out that patients in long-term care hospitals have longer stays than in the other facilities, which results in more opportunities for harm to occur.

The panel that advises Congress on Medicare said the government reimbursed 411 long-term care hospitals 2017.

Agencies Already Working

The OIG recommended that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, both parts of the Department of Health and Human Services, work together to create a list of potential adverse events in long-term care hospitals and include information about these events in its outreach to these facilities.

The two health agencies agreed and said they plan to implement both recommendations. The agencies have previously created a list of adverse events for hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and rehabilitation hospitals in response to previous OIG reports.

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