Updates to Hospice Compare for the May 2019 Refresh

As part of broader efforts to ensure healthcare safety and quality, CMS has made some key improvements to Hospice Compare for the May 2019 refresh. First, Hospice Compare now posts additional information describing the characteristics of Medicare hospice organizations in a user-friendly way, using data from the Hospice Utilization and Payment Public Use File (Hospice PUF). Second, the Hospice Compare search function will undergo an annual update of ZIP code data, which helps ensure accurate search results.

Summary

Beginning in May 2019, Hospice Compare will place data from the Hospice PUF under a series of tabs that users can access when they view provider results. The data on these new tabs capture information that many consumers seek during the hospice selection process, and can therefore help them make informed decisions publicly. Also, in May 2019, CMS is updating the ZIP code database that powers the Hospice Compare search engine. CMS has also initiated a process to remove ZIP codes in service locations that associated hospices haven't served for at least 12 months.

Background on the Public Use File data

CMS publishes the Hospice PUF annually on its website: https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Medicare-Provider-Charge-Data/Hospice.html. The Hospice PUF contains 100% of Medicare enrollment and fee-for-service final claims data. CMS has observed that these files are extensively downloaded, often for research; however, they're not in a user-friendly format, and don't support provider selection by consumers. As part of CMS's ongoing efforts to make Hospice Compare more informative to beneficiaries, caregivers, loved ones, and their families, CMS finalized a proposal in the FY 2019 Hospice Wage Index Final Rule (83 FR 38622, August 8, 2018) to add information from CMS public files, like the Hospice PUF, to Hospice Compare in a user-friendly format. These data on hospice characteristics from the Hospice PUF can serve as one more piece of information, along with quality and patient experience metrics, to help consumers effectively and efficiently compare hospice providers and make informed decisions. Hospice Compare follows in the footsteps of Nursing Home Compare and End Stage Renal Disease Compare in posting this type of data to supplement their patient experience and quality metrics. May 2019 is the first time data from the Hospice PUF will appear on the Hospice Compare website.

Details on PUF data posting on Hospice Compare in May 2019
Beginning in May 2019, Hospice Compare will post these data from the Hospice PUF: the number of patients cared for by a hospice on average each day (average daily census); levels of

hospice care provided; conditions treated;[1] and site of service where care was provided.[2] These data will be placed under a series of tabs which users can access when they view provider results. The PUF data on Hospice Compare posted in May 2019 come from the three latest years of available Hospice PUF data, which currently are calendar years (CY) 2014, 2015, and 2016. The latest Hospice PUF data are typically released each summer. CMS plans to update this data annually on Hospice Compare so that the information always reflects the latest three years of available Hospice PUF data.

For more information, please visit: https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Medicare-Provider-Charge-Data/Hospice.html.

Background on updates to the Hospice Compare search function

On Hospice Compare, users can search for hospice agencies either by name or location. CMS prepares a database of ZIP codes, linked to hospice agencies, that powers the search function by location. To address previous gaps in the search results, CMS added ZIP codes of the locations hospices served from both Medicare claims and Hospice Item Set (HIS) data beginning in early 2018. At the same time, CMS initiated processes for annual updates of the claims data, complemented by quarterly updates of the HIS data, to ensure the search function in Hospice Compare is as consistent and comprehensive as possible. CMS also used geographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau to validate and improve the accuracy of the ZIP codes drawn from the claims data. These updates and refresh cycles were reported to the public in the FY 2019 Hospice Wage Index Final Rule (8383 FR 38622, 38648). The May 2019 refresh includes the annual update of the validated Medicare claims ZIP codes and the quarterly update of the HIS ZIP codes. In addition, the May 2019 refresh applies a process for removing ZIP codes that haven't been served by associated hospice agencies for at least 12 months.

Three data sources contribute to the ZIP code database for Hospice Compare
CMS uses data from 3 sources to prepare this database: Hospice Item Set (HIS), Medicare claims, and the Census.
- HIS: Version 2 of the HIS, implemented in April 2017, contains an item requesting hospice providers to enter the ZIP code associated with where the hospice care is being delivered for each patient. Along with the HIS-based quality measures, the HIS ZIP code data are updated in Hospice Compare on a quarterly basis to ensure the search function remains up-to-date.
- Medicare claims: for each claim, claims data report the mailing address of the hospice agency providing care and the ZIP code of the service location. CMS updates the Hospice Compare ZIP code database with new Medicare claims data annually, when a new calendar year of claims data are made available.
- Census data: since 2000, the Census establishes geographic area information, called Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSA), for more populated areas with an urban center.

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[1] A beneficiary will only be counted in one of the six diagnostic categories, depending on which primary diagnosis the beneficiary received for the most hospice care days.

[2] Site of service is based on where the beneficiaries received the most hospice care days.

Since May 2018, CMS uses CBSA data to validate the patient ZIP code data in the Medicare claims data.

New process for removing old ZIP codes

To ensure that the ZIP code database remain accurate, CMS has initiated a process to remove ZIP codes that are likely not representative of hospice providers' active service or catchment areas. Specifically, CMS will remove ZIP codes that a hospice hasn't served for at least 12 months. Our analysis shows that only a small percentage of ZIP codes (2%)) have been removed since initiation of this process, and that for the majority of hospices, fewer than 5ZIP codes were removed. These findings indicate that the removal process is helping to keep the ZIP code database up-to-date, without negatively affecting the representation of hospices in the geographic areas where they are active. While the findings don't indicate any unintended consequences of applying this process, CMS will be monitoring carefully to catch and address any issues that arise.

For more information, please visit: https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Quality-Initiatives-Patient-Assessment-Instruments/Hospice-Quality-Reporting/Public-Reporting-Background-and-Announcements.html.