

# Report Spotlights Facility Quality

## “Outdated” Nursing Home Profile Has Seen Significant Changes

The types of residents and the care offered by nursing facilities may have changed greatly over the past few years, but the commitment to providing quality care remains the same, according to the “2009 Annual Quality Report” released by the American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care.

The report calls the idea of “nursing homes” of the past, where chronically ill seniors went to live with no hope of recovery, “outdated.”

Instead, they should be described as “nursing and rehabilitation facilities,” because almost half of the people admitted go home after staying at the facility for a month.

The population can be sorted into patients, or those who are there for a short stay usually for rehab or complex medical care, and residents, those with more chronic conditions that need to stay longer.

“A variety of factors have contributed to these changes, including significant increases in the medical complexity of patients and an increase in short-term rehabilitation patients who are able to return to their community following treatment, resulting

‘The number of residents who spend most of their time in bed or in a chair has dropped 40 percent, the report found.’

### STATS SHOW MARKED IMPROVEMENTS

Quality measures have improved dramatically in a wide range of clinical areas, according to the report.

Citing data from the Office of Inspector General, the report found that the between 1999 and 2007:

- The percentage of residents losing weight dropped 19.5 percent, to 9.9 percent;
- The percentage of residents restrained dropped to 5.2 percent, a decline of 50.5 percent;
- The prevalence of dehydration dropped 81.3 percent, to 0.3 percent;
- The number of residents who spend most of their time in bed or in a chair has dropped 40 percent;
- The prevalence of tube feeding is down 17.3 percent, to 6.7 percent of residents;
- The prevalence of pressure ulcers has dropped 12 percent, to 9.5 percent; and
- The prevalence of little or no activity has plummeted by 75.7 percent.

in meaningful changes to our skilled labor force and to the way we provide care,” AHCA President and Chief Executive Officer Bruce Yarwood and Alliance President Alan Rosenbloom wrote in the report.

“We remain committed to continuously promoting quality improvements, challenging ourselves to always do better, and building upon these gains in the years ahead.”

Funding is a primary reason for the changes. The report notes that the majority of Medicare post-hospitalization patients now go to nursing and rehabilitation facilities instead of other post-acute providers. Since 2003, there has been a 15 percent increase in the share of Medicare patients at nursing and rehabilitation facilities.

The most com-

mon diagnoses for short-stay patients include major joint and limb reattachment of lower extremity, heart failure and shock, hip replacement, kidney and urinary tract infection, stroke, and renal failure.

Nursing facilities are providing “more intensive and regular nursing care,” the report found.

“Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and certified nurse assistants accounted for nearly 60 percent of the almost 1.6 million workers employed at nursing care facilities in 2007,” the report says.

Meanwhile, the report outlines facilities’ commitment to quality, with the numbers to prove it.

Based on survey results from 73 organizations representing 5,713 nursing and rehabilitation facilities, as well as 631 individual facilities, 99 percent of facilities reported having a continuous quality improvement program in place. One hundred percent of respondents said they have taken at least one step to make improvements in the 10 quality measures established by the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services Five Star Quality Rating program, the report says.

A separate but related report—“Changes in the Quality of Nursing Homes in the U.S.”—by lead author Vincent Mor, professor and chair, Department of Community Health, Alpert Medical School at Brown University, was released along with the report.

“It is clear that nursing home quality is multidimensional,” wrote Mor, *et al.* “What is also becoming clear is that it is no more appropriate to compare all nursing homes with one another than it would be appropriate to compare an obstetrics hospital with an oncology hospital.”

—Suzanne Struglinski and Lynn Wagner