

# HCAHPS – ARE YOU PREPARED FOR YOUR SCORES GOING PUBLIC?

**In March 2008, the first posting of Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Services (HCAHPS) data will be available on the web. Information never before accessible to the general public will now be available to consumers to help them evaluate, compare and select a hospital.**

This first round will provide data that was voluntarily submitted. Henceforth, quarterly participation is required for a hospital to receive full reimbursement from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). HCAHPS' measurement instruments (vendor and self-produced) were standardized and approved by CMS prior to use.

In the past, consumers had to rely on word-of-mouth, magazine rankings like *U.S. News & World Report's* "Best Hospitals" and medical rating services, such as HealthGrades, to help them select a provider. The HCAHPS posting is an initial step in the increasing transparency of the reporting of healthcare-related data, including infections and patient-care outcomes, that will become evident over the next few years.

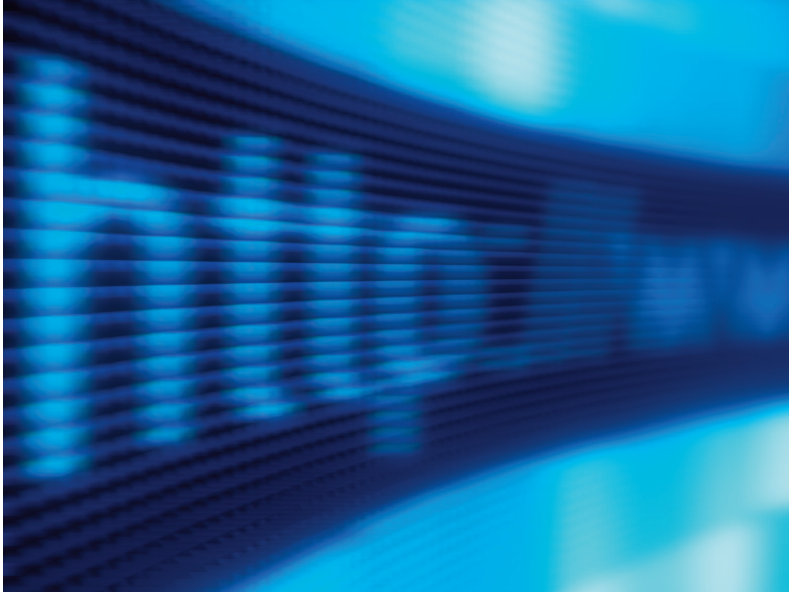
Healthcare organizations that do not perform as well as consumers expect could see a negative effect on their revenue due to the potential loss of patients and damaged reputations. Conversely, a stellar review could become an outstanding marketing tool, improve employee retention and influence physician recruitment. Some hospitals have decided to take a wait-and-see approach on the impact of public reporting on their organization before developing action plans based on their scores.

A recent report by Press Ganey and Associates listed the top five priority areas that will likely affect HCAHPS scores:

- Attentiveness to patients' personal needs
- Responsiveness to concerns and complaints
- Level of courtesy and respect
- Care with which doctors listen
- Extent of efforts to mitigate pain

## RISK MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- Has the hospital instituted a program to improve patient perceptions?
  - Has there been service recovery training?
- When educating staff, were the same terms employed as in the questionnaire?
  - e.g., *privacy, security, and safety*
- Has staff been educated on simplifying their language?
- Do staff members introduce themselves? Are white boards used in patient rooms?
- Has local media been educated on HCAHPS so they can provide a balanced story?
  - Do you have a response prepared for media questions concerning your results?
- Are you posting your data on your website?
- If a score is not where you anticipated, are you addressing actions to improve on your website?



- Are you prepared for public reports to be used to support allegations of substandard care?
- Has your board been educated on what to expect?

Public reporting is intended to support consumer decision making, further encourage provider accountability and create consumer-driven performance improvements. An organization that demonstrates honest communications, trust and caring has been shown to positively influence patient, medical staff and employee satisfaction and dramatically reduce its exposure to litigation.

The sites listed below may be helpful in learning more about HCAHPS.

- <http://www.hcahpsonline.org>
- <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/HospitalQualityInits/downloads/HospitalHCAHPSFactSheet200709.pdf>
- <http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov>

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