

## INPATIENT HOSPITAL RULE CEMENTS NEW POLICIES ON PRICE TRANSPARENCY

Hospitals will have to post their inpatient prices online, will no longer be required to report dozens of quality measures, and will see their overall inpatient pay hiked by an average of 2.4 percent, CMS said in the final fiscal 2019 Hospital Inpatient Prospective Payment System (HIPPS) rule released August 2nd. The payment rule also follows through on the agency's planned changes to the program which encourage hospitals to make better use of electronic health records, and eliminates the so-called 25 percent rule that reduced Medicare reimbursements for long-term care hospitals that admit more than a quarter of their patients from a single acute-care hospital.

Under the rule, hospitals will have to post a list of their standard charges on the internet in a machine-readable format and update them at least once a year. Administrator Seema Verma touted the policy as a way to give more transparency to patients, and CMS said it will keep looking at other potential actions to increase transparency.

The rule finalizes the agency's proposed changes to the electronic health record program formerly known

as meaningful use, which CMS now calls the Promoting Interoperability Program. The agency will rate hospitals' performance on their use of electronic records using a new scoring methodology that contains fewer objectives and is meant to be less burdensome. One of the most heavily weighted variables in the new system is how well hospitals provide patients with access to their health data, CMS said.

Another major policy contained in the rule is the elimination of dozens of quality measures that hospitals must report. The agency is getting rid of 43 measures across four hospital quality reporting and value-based purchasing programs that the agency says are no longer needed, including measures related to hospital-acquired infections, patient safety and mortality outcomes. CMS said the measures being removed are redundant, show no meaningful distinction in performance among hospitals or have costs that outweigh their benefits.

The HIPPS Final Rule will take effect October 1st for the 2019 fiscal year. ■