

Medicare's Upcoming Themes for QIOs

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To ensure that Medicare beneficiaries receive health care that meets nationally accepted standards of care and to improve the quality and effectiveness of that care, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has contracts with Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) that represent every state, the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. The QIOs work with healthcare providers such as hospitals, nursing facilities, home health agencies, and physician practices that serve Medicare beneficiaries.

CMS directs the work performed by each QIO through a standard contract, known as a Statement of Work (SOW). Under the current 8th SOW, all of the QIOs are engaged in a common set of activities,

including working with hospitals to improve their performance on quality measures, helping primary care physician practices select and implement electronic health records (EHRs), and responding to ben-

eficiary concerns about the quality of care they have received.

The 9th SOW will begin on August 1, 2008. This contract has 2 primary components: national themes and sub-national projects. While activities related to the national themes will be conducted in every designated QIO area, the sub-national requirements will be awarded on a state-by-state basis, depending on CMS' assessment of the state's need and the QIO's approach to improvement. The national themes are Prevention, Patient Safety, and Beneficiary Protection. Cross-cutting activities focus on CMS' Value-driven Health

Table 1. CMS 9th SOW National Theme Summaries*, Including Overviews, Opportunities for Quality Improvement (QI), and QIO Activities

Theme: Prevention

Overview

The overall goal of the Prevention Theme is to improve the quality and frequency of preventive healthcare services to optimize beneficiary quality of life and healthcare efficiencies. The national theme (core prevention) builds on the QIO 8th SOW by focusing on QIOs' abilities to impact the rates of 2 cancer screenings (mammography and colorectal cancer [CRC]) and 2 immunizations (influenza and pneumococcal) among Medicare beneficiaries in each state or jurisdiction.

QIOs will work with a selected group of practices in their states or jurisdictions to accomplish the national tasks. Practices that have enrolled with a QIO to improve rates of mammography and CRC screenings and immunizations must have already implemented EHRs certified by a certifying body recognized by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Collaborating practices will work with their QIOs to implement care management processes, using their certified EHRs that focus on breast cancer and CRC screening and influenza and pneumococcal vaccination.

Opportunity for QI

QIO interventions that support health information technology (HIT) have the potential to improve screening rates through timely notification of providers and patients when a mammogram or CRC screening should be scheduled. Influenza and pneumococcal vaccination levels among adults 65 years of age and older remain well below the Healthy People 2010 objective of 90%. More effective strategies are needed for delivering vaccines to high-risk persons, their providers, and household contacts.

Published research reveals that racial and ethnic minority patients are generally less likely to receive routine medical services than white patients, with African-Americans having fewer routine physician visits and more visits to the emergency department.

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Table 1. CMS 9th SOW National Theme Summaries*, Including Overviews, Opportunities for Quality Improvement (QI), and QIO Activities (continued)

QIO Activities	<p>The primary activities involved in the theme will focus on 9 tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting participating practices • Identifying the pool of nonparticipating practices • Promoting care management processes for preventive services using EHRs • Completing assessments of care processes • Assisting with data submission • Monitoring statewide rates (mammograms, CRC screens, influenza and pneumococcal immunizations) • Administering an assessment of care practices • Producing an annual report of statewide trends, showing baselines and rates • Submitting plans to optimize performance
Theme: Patient Safety	
Overview	<p>QIO activities under this theme will focus on 6 primary topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing rates of healthcare-associated methicillin-resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> (MRSA) infections • Reducing rates of pressure ulcers in nursing homes and hospitals • Reducing rates of use of physical restraints in nursing homes • Improving inpatient surgical safety and heart failure treatment in hospitals • Improving drug safety • Providing quality improvement technical assistance to nursing homes in need
Opportunity for QI	<p>The requirements of the theme, also known as the CMS National Patient Safety Initiative (NPSI), are designed to address areas of patient harm for which there is evidence of how to improve safety by improving healthcare processes and systems. The theme brings forward several components from the 8th SOW (surgical care, heart failure, pressure ulcers and restraints in nursing homes, and drug safety), allowing QIOs to build on the progress they have made with providers over the past 3 years.</p> <p>With the 9th SOW, however, the safety focus also pushes into new areas (MRSA, pressure ulcer prevention in hospitals, and QIO technical assistance for nursing homes in need), giving providers and QIOs the chance to broaden the scope of their patient safety-related improvement activities.</p>
QIO Activities	<p>QIO activities under the NPSI will support the development of an “all-teach, all-learn” community in action to meet the goals within each component of the initiative. To this end, CMS is requesting that QIOs identify 2 or 3 individuals from each QIO to serve as national QI leaders. These individuals will serve as liaisons between QIO senior leadership and the work that is occurring at the patient care level in each state or jurisdiction. They will also act as liaisons with healthcare executives in their respective states or jurisdictions to highlight the work occurring at the national level in their provider groups.</p> <p>QIOs will have a wealth of tools available to them to assist in reaching goals for specific quality measures. These include survey instruments geared toward leadership or patient safety processes in hospitals and nursing homes. Additionally, QIOs can draw on successful tools that were utilized in the 8th SOW. It is expected that as successful tools and practices develop, the QIOs will share these with one another for implementation in other QIO communities.</p> <p>QIOs may expand their local quality improvement communities by reaching out to potential patient safety partners and encouraging their participation to expand the momentum that will be created by the CMS NPSI.</p>
Theme: Beneficiary Protection	
Overview	<p>QIOs will continue to carry out statutorily mandated review activities, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the quality of care provided to beneficiaries • Reviewing beneficiary appeals of certain provider notices • Reviewing potential anti-dumping cases • Implementing quality improvement activities resulting from case review activities

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Care Initiative (which aims to improve sharing of electronic health information, make information about healthcare quality and price available to the public, provide incentives for high-value health care), reduce disparities between racial and ethnic groups in quality of care, and implement care management and patient self-management interventions in physician practices with existing EHR systems. The sub-national themes, for which funding will be provided to selected QIOs, will include efforts to improve the quality of diabetes care provided to underserved minority beneficiaries, detect and prevent the progression of kidney failure among patients with diabetes and increase appropriate vascular access for beneficiaries with end-stage renal disease, and to reduce the rate of readmission to hospitals by improving transitions between different settings of care.

This article presents CMS-gener-

ated summaries of the national themes (Table 1) that will be undertaken by every QIO.

More information about the 9th SOW can be obtained by visiting the CMS Web site at www.cms.gov/QualityImprovementOrgs. *MPM*

Editor's Note: Quality Improvement: The Right Care for Every Person Every Time. A complete listing of all 53 QIO offices is available at www.medicarepatientmanagement.com/.

PROVIDER ACTION

Impact to You

The activities of the Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) are dictated by CMS through the Statement of Work (SOW).

What You Need to Know

There is a QIO in every state plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and US Virgin Islands. Each QIO is tasked by CMS to work with providers and beneficiaries on improving healthcare delivery. The 9th SOW, which will begin on August 1, 2008, focuses on 3 themes, including prevention, patient safety, and beneficiary protection, with a heavy focus on transitions of care and electronic health records.

What You Need to Do

Practices should contact their local QIOs to find opportunities to participate in pilot projects or enlist their support.

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Table 1. CMS 9th SOW National Theme Summaries*, Including Overviews, Opportunities for Quality Improvement (QI), and QIO Activities (continued)

Opportunity for QI	Individual patient complaints and provider medical record reviews are important starting points for analysis of quality improvement needs among providers. QIOs will be increasing their efforts to link case review activities to improvements in the quality of care, specifically by developing quality improvement activities focused on system-wide changes. QIOs will utilize all data related to case review activities to identify problems associated with the quality of care and design QIO activities aimed at helping providers correct these problems. The QIOs will be responsible for collaborating with all pertinent CMS contractors to ensure that all available data are considered and to maximize opportunities for quality improvement.
QIO Activities	The activities involved in the theme will focus on 9 tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case reviews • QIO activities • Alternative dispute resolution, including mediation • Sanction activities • Physician acknowledgement monitoring • Collaboration with other CMS contractors • Promoting transparency through reporting • Quality data reporting • Communication (education and information)

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