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Advocacy Pays Off!

CMS to Implement System to Improve Staffing Information

We are thrilled to inform you that late yesterday afternoon President Obama signed into law the *Improving Medicare Post-Acute Care Transformation (IMPACT) Act of 2014* - post acute care reform legislation - which included \$11 million to fund the development of a system for collection of nursing home staffing levels through verifiable payroll data. The Consumer Voice, along with the Coalition of Geriatric Nursing Organizations and Altarum Institute's Center for Elder Care and Advanced Illness, have been strongly advocating for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to implement this new system that is more than two years overdue.

Accurate staffing data are essential for many reasons. Because research shows there is a strong relationship between staffing in nursing homes and quality of care, consumers and their families need real-time, reliable information about the number and type of staff in order to make informed decisions when choosing a nursing home. Regrettably, reliable data about levels of staff such as nurses and nursing assistants are not available. The nurse staffing ratios that are posted on CMS's Nursing Home Compare Website and used in the agency's Five Star rating system are increasingly acknowledged as inadequate and inaccurate. These data are self-reported by facilities once a year, based on a two-week period prior to a nursing home's annual inspection and are not subject to being audited. As a result, consumers and family members select facilities using flawed and sometimes misleading information, which can affect the quality and safety of resident care. Accurate staffing data are also vitally important for policymakers, health care professionals, nursing home providers, and researchers who are dedicated to improving the quality of services.

Passage of the IMPACT Act with its funding for creating a payroll-based data collection system is a victory for all those committed to improving the lives of millions of Americans receiving services and living in nursing homes. Consumer Voice and other advocates commend Congress for its decisive action, as well as President Obama for signing the bill into law, and now call on CMS to operationalize this system without further delay. Implementation of the payroll data collection system is part of the Consumer Voice's Nursing Home Staffing Campaign. To learn more about the campaign, go to <http://theconsumervoice.org/betterstaffing>.