
Special Focus Facility (“SFF”) Initiative - Background

This webpage offers a list of nursing homes that have had a history of serious quality problems. We have included these nursing homes in a special program to stimulate improvements in their quality of care. Please take a minute to review this background information on our “Special Focus Facility” initiative so you can be as informed as possible when you discuss your long term care options with any nursing home that is listed here – and what they are doing to improve their quality of care.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), together with States, visit nursing homes on a regular basis to determine if the nursing homes are providing the quality of care that Medicare and Medicaid requires. These “survey” or “inspection” teams will identify deficiencies in the quality of care that is provided, as well as deficiencies in meeting CMS safety requirements (such as protection from fire hazards). When deficiencies are identified, we require that the problems be corrected. If serious problems are not corrected, we may terminate the nursing home’s participation in Medicare and Medicaid.

Most nursing homes have some deficiencies, with the average being 6-7 deficiencies per survey. Most nursing homes correct their problems within a reasonable time period. However, we have found that a minority of nursing homes have more problems than other nursing homes (about twice the average number of deficiencies), have more serious problems than most other nursing homes, and continue to have serious problems over a long period of time. Although such nursing homes periodically instituted enough improvements in the presenting problems that they would be in substantial compliance on one survey, they would be determined as providing substandard quality of care on the next. Such facilities with a “yo-yo” compliance history rarely addressed underlying systemic problems that were giving rise to repeated cycles of serious deficiencies. To address this problem CMS created the “Special Focus Facility” (SFF) initiative.

CMS requires that SFF nursing homes be visited in person by survey teams twice as frequently as other nursing homes (about twice per year). The longer the problems persist, the more stringent we are in the enforcement actions that will be taken. Examples of such enforcement actions are civil monetary penalties (“fines”) or termination from Medicare and Medicaid. Within about 18-24 months after a facility is identified by CMS as an SFF nursing home, we expect that there will be one of 3 possible outcomes:

- (a) The nursing home graduates from the SFF program because it has made significant improvements in quality of care - and those improvements are continued over time;
- (b) The nursing home is terminated from participation in the Medicare and Medicaid programs. While such a nursing may continue to operate (depending on State law), usually it will close once Medicare and Medicaid funding is discontinued. In such a case the State Medicaid Agency (and others) will assist all nursing home residents to transition to another residence that can provide a better and acceptable quality of care. This may include a variety of possibilities, such as another nursing home, a community-based setting, or apartment with good support services.
- (c) The nursing home is provided with some additional time to continue in the SFF program because there has been very promising progress, such as the sale of the nursing home to another owner with a much better track record of providing quality care.

How Can You Use This Information

If you are considering admission to a nursing home included on this list you may want to:

- Above all, visit the nursing home. Talk to staff, residents, and other families. You may request to see the results from the last State or CMS survey (it should be in a place that is easily accessible.)
- Before your visit, look at the survey history of the nursing home on *Nursing Home Compare* to see what areas may be problematic.
- Ask the nursing home staff what they are doing to improve the quality of care for residents in the nursing home.
- Call the State survey agency (link to *Nursing Home Compare*) to find out more about the nursing home. Look at the length of time that a nursing home has been on the SFF list. This is particularly important if the nursing home has been an SFF nursing home for more than 18-24 months, since such nursing homes are closer to either graduating (due to improvements) or ending their participation in Medicare and Medicaid.
- Call your local State Ombudsman, Administration on Aging, and local groups to find out more about the nursing home.
- Use the Nursing Home Brochure found at <http://www.medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/nursinghome.pdf> and “Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home” <http://www.medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/02174.pdf> - both publications are available on *Nursing Home Compare*.

If you currently reside in a SFF nursing home, please know that this home is being closely monitored (it is inspected twice as often as other nursing homes). You may also direct any questions you have to the contacts above. The good news is that about 50% of the nursing homes in the SFF program significantly improve their quality of care within 24-30 months after being selected for the SFF initiative, while about 16% tend to be terminated from Medicare and Medicaid.

List of SFFs in the Program 6 Months or Longer

In the download below is a list of nursing homes that have been selected as a SFF, have failed to make significant progress on the most recent survey, and continue to be in the SFF program. If you wish to learn more about a specific home, please contact the State survey agency or the Ombudsman's office in your area which can be found in the [Helpful Contacts](#) section of *Nursing Home Compare*.

Important Note

The State survey agencies are responsible for entering survey information into CMS' databases and providing updates as needed. Every attempt is made to assure the accuracy and timeliness of the information on the list. However, data lags of up to several months can occur between completion of a survey and posting of data on this list. We advise interpreting this information cautiously and supplementing it with information from the ombudsman's office, the State survey agency, or other sources.