

ESRD QIP

Questions and Answers for Patients and Families

You may have questions about the End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Quality Incentive Program (QIP). Here are some answers to common questions. You can also learn more about the ESRD QIP on Medicare's Dialysis Facility Compare website at <http://www.medicare.gov/DialysisFacilityCompare/search.html>.

ESRD QIP Basics

Why did Medicare cover ESRD?

In the past, patients who needed dialysis often couldn't get treatment because there weren't many dialysis facilities. Patient advocates asked Congress to cover ESRD treatment for patients of all ages to make it easier to receive dialysis. In 1972, Medicare implemented the ESRD benefit. Forty years later, ESRD is still the only medical condition that is fully covered by Medicare for patients of any age.

What is the ESRD QIP?

The ESRD QIP was created by Congress in a law called the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008. The ESRD QIP aims to make care quality better by paying for better health outcomes, which is a change in the health status of a person, group, or population.

The ESRD QIP adjusts payment for ESRD services by measuring how well dialysis facilities provide care. Medicare pays less to facilities that give low-quality care. This way of paying for medical care is called "value-based purchasing." The ESRD QIP was the first Medicare program to use value-based purchasing with the hope that it will reduce healthcare costs while improving medical care.

How does the ESRD QIP work?

The ESRD QIP uses "performance measures" to weigh the quality of care dialysis facilities provide. There are two kinds of performance measures: reporting measures and clinical measures.

Clinical measures tell about the quality of the care given by dialysis facilities. If dialysis facilities provide high-quality care, then they receive more points. Dialysis facilities that provide lower-quality care receive fewer points.

Reporting measures tell how well dialysis facilities share information about patient care with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Facilities that share a lot of information earn more points on the reporting measures. Facilities that share less information with CMS earn fewer points.

Every year, CMS adds up all the points each dialysis facility receives on clinical and reporting measures. The end result is a "Total Performance Score," or overall grade of each facility's performance. If a dialysis facility's Total Performance Score is high enough, that facility receives

100% of its payment. If a dialysis facility's Total Performance Score is too low, CMS will reduce the payment for services provided by up to 2%.

Why does the ESRD QIP change from year to year?

CMS is always trying to improve the ESRD QIP. Every year, doctors and other medical professionals find new ways to measure the quality of the care they provide, so CMS learns new things about patients with ESRD and the care they receive. CMS can then change the ESRD QIP to better measure the care that facilities provide to patients with ESRD.

How does CMS change the ESRD QIP from year to year?

Every June, CMS publishes a proposed rule in the Federal Register that lists the new or changing measures that it wants to include in the ESRD QIP. The proposed rule also outlines how CMS will measure the quality of care provided to patients with ESRD.

Once the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register, the public has 60 days to make comments on it. This "comment period" is a great opportunity to tell CMS what you think about the ESRD QIP.

After the comment period is over, CMS reviews the public comments. Using the feedback to decide which parts of the proposed rule to keep, change, and remove, CMS revises the proposed rule to make the final rule. CMS then publishes the final rule in the Federal Register every November.

ESRD QIP Details

What does the ESRD QIP measure?

The performance measures change from year to year. The ESRD QIP addresses the following measurement topics.

- **Anemia Management:** Many patients with ESRD have low levels of red blood cells. CMS measures how well dialysis facilities take care of each patient's red blood cell levels.
- **Dialysis Adequacy:** CMS measures how well a dialysis facility's treatments cleanse a patient's blood of wastes.
- **Infections:** CMS wants dialysis facilities to prevent infections. The ESRD QIP includes measures that reward fistula use. The ESRD QIP also requires all dialysis facilities to report bloodstream infections to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Patient Experience of Care.** CMS measures how patients feel about the care they receive by asking in-center hemodialysis facilities to conduct patient surveys.

How does CMS share a facility's performance in the ESRD QIP with the public?

CMS publicly reports facility ESRD QIP performance in three ways.

- CMS gives each facility a two-page Performance Score Certificate in English and in Spanish. The Performance Score Certificate explains a facility's performance for a specific year, and the facility must display both versions in an area where you can easily see them.

- CMS puts ESRD QIP information on Dialysis Facility Compare, an online resource that anyone can use to learn more about individual facilities. Dialysis Facility Compare is available at <http://www.medicare.gov/DialysisFacilityCompare/search.html>.
- CMS shares detailed facility information on the internet each year in a file titled “ESRD QIP Dialysis Facility Performance Information,” available at <https://data.medicare.gov/data/dialysis-facility-compare>.

What does the Performance Score Certificate mean to patients?

The Performance Score Certificate shows how well a facility performed on specific measures. The certificate may help you make decisions about dialysis care. CMS encourages you to discuss the scores on the certificate with physicians and other medical staff at the facility.

Will Performance Score Certificates be available to patients and the public through other sources?

No, but the same information that appears on the Performance Score Certificate will also appear on the Dialysis Facility Compare website available at <http://www.medicare.gov/DialysisFacilityCompare/search.html>. CMS updates the information posted on the Dialysis Facility Compare website each quarter.

Does the Performance Score Certificate offer a complete picture of the quality of care that a facility provides?

ESRD is a complex disease that affects virtually every aspect of your life. Treatment must consider your condition, other illnesses, emotional well-being, nutrition, and much more.

As a result, performance measures used in the ESRD QIP can’t show all parts of the care provided by a facility. When choosing a dialysis facility, CMS recommends that you consider the results on the Performance Score Certificate along with other information, such as recommendations from your nephrologist, your primary care provider, or a patient who is treated at a local dialysis facility.

Most importantly, you should talk with your treatment team about any concerns you have about information listed on the Performance Score Certificate.

What does it mean if a Total Performance Score was not calculated for my facility?

There are different reasons why a facility might not get a Total Performance Score. For example, if a facility did not treat enough patients to earn a score, then it would not qualify to receive a Total Performance Score.

How do the ESRD QIP measures differ from the measures reported in the Dialysis Facility Compare Report?

The information in these tools may be similar, but they usually have some important differences, too. For example, the numbers may be calculated differently or the projects may use similar measurements but from different years. Each tool gives you information to use to find the best care for you.

Future ESRD QIP Plans

How does CMS monitor the impact of the ESRD QIP on patients?

CMS believes that the ESRD QIP helps patients with ESRD receive high-quality care. For example, the program measures how well a facility's dialysis treatments clean a patient's blood. In this way, the ESRD QIP helps guard against the possibility that facilities might "cut corners" and not provide enough treatment.

CMS also believes that the ESRD QIP might affect patient care in unexpected ways. CMS wants to make sure that everyone who needs dialysis care has access to it—especially racial and ethnic minorities. If CMS discovers that participating in the ESRD QIP reduces the quality of care a facility provides, or if CMS learns that a facility is turning away patients to improve its performance in the ESRD QIP, then CMS will work with the facility to solve the problem. CMS actively monitors data about the ESRD QIP to find problems before they get out of control.

Staying Connected with the ESRD QIP

I have questions about the ESRD QIP. What should I do?

CMS gives information about the ESRD QIP at <http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Quality-Initiatives-Patient-Assessment-Instruments/ESRDQIP/index.html>. If you have questions about the program, please send them to the ESRD QIP inbox at ESRDQIP@cms.hhs.gov.

You can also talk about any concerns with your treatment team, a patient representative at the facility, or your Network (see www.esrdncc.org).