



MEDICARE ADVANTAGE GROUP

DATE: January 4, 2008

TO: All Medicare Advantage Organizations

FROM: David A. Lewis, Director

SUBJECT: Public Comment Period on Proposed Quality Measures for Medicare Special Needs Plans

Special Needs Plans (SNPs) were created by Congress as a new type of Medicare Advantage plan focused on certain vulnerable groups of Medicare beneficiaries. Under Title 42 CFR Part 422, Subpart D, Medicare Advantage (MA) plans must participate in quality improvement activities including the reporting of performance measures for the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS), Medicare Health Outcome Survey (HOS) and Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS).

Since January 2007, the Geriatric Measurement Panel (GMAP) of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), has been developing recommendations for evaluating SNPs. In March 2007, NCQA proposed a potential list of evaluation measures for SNPs, which were approved by the GMAP in November 2007. These recommendations included thirteen HEDIS measures and a set of Structure and Process measures. For details about the approach and the measures, please refer to the documents posted on NCQA's website (www.ncqa.org). In the Call Letter for 2008, released on April 19, 2007, plans were notified that CMS was working to develop performance measures for SNPs.

Currently, CMS measures plans only at the contract level, not at the plan benefit package level using existing HEDIS measures and only for contracts with a minimum of 1,000 members. NCQA will collect measures from every SNP at the plan benefit package level. NCQA intends to provide CMS with a preliminary report of findings in September 2008. Some contractors have been reporting HEDIS measures at the contract level for more than ten years. Structure and Process measures are familiar to plans that are NCQA accredited.

On December 12, 2007, NCQA posted the measures and supporting documents for public comment. The public comment period which will be open until January 18, 2008 is a standard operating procedure for NCQA. SNPs interested in commenting should visit www.ncqa.org.

Public comments will be considered by the GMAP and used to inform the revisions to the measures. The measures will be finalized in March/April 2008. Afterwards, NCQA and CMS will notify plans and work with them to begin the data collection and submission process.

For questions, contact John H. Hebb at 410-786-6657 or John.Hebb@cms.hhs.gov.