

Physician Compare: What you need to know

On December 30, 2010 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) launched the first phase of the Physician Compare website which expands and updates the CMS' Healthcare Provider Directory with new information about physicians and other healthcare workers and the services those professionals provide. The website, at www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor, is designed to be consumer friendly and help all patients—whether on Medicare or not—locate health professionals in their communities. The information on the site includes contact and address information for offices, the professional's medical specialty, where the professional completed his or her degree as well as residency or other clinical training, whether the professional speaks a foreign language, and the professional's gender. The tool can also help Medicare beneficiaries identify which physicians participate in the Medicare program.

In addition to information about the physician's practice, Physician Compare also shows consumers whether the practice reported certain data to CMS through the Physician Quality Reporting System, formerly known as the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI). Later in 2011, CMS plans a second phase of the website which will indicate whether professionals chose to participate in the voluntary e-prescribing initiative.

The new site, which was required by the Affordable Care Act of 2010, contains information about physicians enrolled in the Medicare program, which include Doctors of Medicine, Osteopathy, Optometry, Podiatric Medicine, and Chiropractic, as well as information about other types of health professionals who routinely care for Medicare beneficiaries, including nurse practitioners, clinical psychologists, registered dietitians, physical therapists, physician assistants, and occupational therapists. The information on the site comes from the Provider Enrollment, Chain, and Ownership System (PECOS). If your information is incorrect or missing you should hit the "Note to Providers" tab at the top of the page for hints on how to troubleshoot the problem.

In future years, the Physician Compare website will be expanded to include information on physician performance in areas such as quality of care, efficiency and patient experience. CMS is required by the Affordable Care Act to develop a plan to implement this expansion by 2013 and have been seeking input from providers and the public on what this should look like and how it can be accomplished. We will continue to provide you with additional information as it evolves. CMS already has a number of comparison sites available for the public on hospitals, nursing homes, etc. that may provide an indication of how the Physician Compare website could function in the future. If you are curious take a look at <http://www.healthcare.gov/compare/index.html>.

