



QUICK TIPS TO IMPROVE Medicare 5-Star quality ratings for CAHPS and HOS

Two different patient satisfaction surveys affect CMS Star ratings:

- 1. The Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) survey,** mailed March through June.
- 2. The Health Outcomes Survey (HOS),** mailed April through July.

Blue Shield of California has compiled a list of questions from these member satisfaction surveys used by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to assess your patients' perception of you, your staff and the health plan. These surveys account for 32% of the health plan's Star rating. More than half of the Star ratings measures – which include these patient satisfaction measures – are influenced by physicians and their support staff.

To help improve patient satisfaction and survey results, we ask that you please review these questions and the associated best practice recommendations below. We hope you will consider integrating some of these methods into your practice if you are not currently doing so.

Also, please remind your patients that they may receive surveys asking about their healthcare experience and encourage them to complete the surveys. We care about their experience and want feedback on how to improve. Please tell them to call your office or Blue Shield if they do not understand a question or need help.

You can positively influence ratings while improving health

When working with your Medicare patients, encourage and motivate them to:

- Adopt healthy lifestyle changes
- Adhere to screenings and vaccinations that are necessary to help maintain their health
- Get their annual physical exam
- Discuss issues such as increasing physical activity, bladder incontinence and mental health

Finally, offer patients easy-to-understand educational resources related to prevention, wellness, fitness and other health-related topics of interest to Medicare members. Make these readily available in your waiting and exam rooms, and use them in your patient discussions.



5-STAR METRIC: CARE COORDINATION

CAHPS Survey Questions

- Q:** In the past six months, when you visited your personal doctor for a scheduled appointment, how often did he or she have your medical records or other information about your care?
- Q:** In the past six months, when your personal doctor ordered a blood test, X-ray or other test for you, how often did someone from your personal doctor's office follow up to give you those results?
- Q:** In the past six months, when your personal doctor ordered a blood test, X-ray or other test for you, how often did you get those results as soon as you needed them?
- Q:** In the past six months, how often did you and your personal doctor talk about the prescription medicines you were taking?
- Q:** In the past six months, did you get the help you needed from your personal doctor's office to manage your care among these different providers? (Question applicable if patient had other providers they were receiving care from.)
- Q:** In the past six months, how often did your personal doctor seem informed and up-to-date about the care you got from specialists?
- Q:** Visit notes sum up what was talked about on a visit to a doctor's office. Visit notes may be available on paper, on a website or by email. In the past six months, did anyone in your personal doctor's office offer you visit notes?

Recommendations

- Locate and review patients' medical records prior to their appointments and have records easily accessible during visits.
- Discuss patients' medications at every appointment.
- Let patients know when and how they can expect to receive test results, and instruct them to contact your office if they need assistance.
- Ensure that patients do not undergo unnecessary duplicate services such as X-rays, blood tests, etc.
- Deliver multiple services during one visit.
- Provide patients with an agenda-setting form to organize their medical needs either prior to their visit or while in the waiting room.
- Make an after-visit summary available at the end of the appointment so patients can track what was discussed and next steps.



5-STAR METRIC: GETTING CARE QUICKLY

CAHPS Survey Questions

- Q:** In the past six months, when you needed care right away, how often did you get care as soon as you thought you needed?
- Q:** In the past six months, not counting the times you needed care right away, how often did you get an appointment for your health care at a doctor's office or clinic as soon as you thought you needed?
- Q:** Wait time includes time spent in the waiting room and exam room. In the past six months, how often did you see the person you came to see within 15 minutes of your appointment time?

Recommendations

- Acknowledge wait times of longer than 15 minutes by apologizing, providing an explanation and giving an approximate time patients can expect to be seen.
- Manage patients' expectations when they are significantly early for their appointments: Say thank you and explain that because they are early, the wait may be longer than 15 minutes.
- Offer to reschedule appointments for patients when the physician is running more than 30 minutes late.
- Let patients know before they come to the office that the physician is behind schedule so they can adjust their arrival or reschedule their appointment.
- Ensure a few appointments each day are available to accommodate urgent visits.
- Maintain an effective triage system to ensure that frail and/or very sick patients are seen right away.
- Offer appointments with a nurse practitioner or physician's assistant to patients who want to be seen on short notice but cannot be seen by their doctor.
- Encourage patients to make their routine appointments for checkups or follow-up visits as soon as they can (weeks or even months in advance).
- Proactively schedule patients months before their tests, screenings or physicals are due. Don't wait for patients to call.
- Consider limited-hour Saturday appointments weekly or bimonthly.



5-STAR METRIC: GETTING NEEDED CARE AND SEEING SPECIALISTS

CAHPS Survey Questions

- Q:** In the past six months, how often was it easy to get appointments with specialists?
- Q:** In the past six months, how often was it easy to get the care, tests or treatment you needed through your health plan?

Recommendations

- Offer to contact the specialist's office and assist patients with scheduling the appointment when the referral is urgent or critical.
- Set patient expectations regarding how long it may take to get a specialist appointment. Explain that some specialists' schedules are busier than others and getting an appointment may take up to three or four weeks.
- Provide patients with written contact information for the specialist they will see – if known – as well as the reason for the referral and referral authorization number.
- Establish shared processes with specialists' offices you refer to most often to make it faster and easier for your patients to schedule appointments.
- Let patients know they can contact you if they do not receive the referral or if they are not able to schedule an appointment with the specialist within their needed time frame.



5-STAR METRIC: ANNUAL FLU VACCINE

CAHPS Survey Question

Q: Have you had a flu shot since July 1?

Recommendations

- Encourage flu shots starting in July. Patients are more likely to get the flu vaccine when it is recommended and/or offered by their doctor.
- Dispel any myths the patient may have about getting the flu from the flu shot.



5-STAR METRIC: MONITORING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

HOS Survey Questions

- Q:** In the past 12 months, did you talk with a doctor or other health provider about your level of exercise or physical activity? For example, a doctor or other health provider may ask if you exercise regularly or take part in physical exercise.
- Q:** In the past 12 months, did a doctor or other health provider advise you to start, increase or maintain your level of exercise or physical activity? For example, in order to improve your health, your doctor or other health provider may advise you to start taking the stairs, to increase walking from 10 to 20 minutes every day or to maintain your current exercise program.

Recommendations

- Have medical assistants assess a patient's physical activity level and then discuss it with the patient.
- Provide educational materials and suggest community resources such as gyms and fitness classes including the SilverSneakers® program, available to all individual Blue Shield Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug Plan members at no extra cost.
- Consider referral to physical therapy so patients with limited mobility can learn safe and effective exercises.
- Write a physical activity prescription for patients. The Exercise is Medicine® initiative provides an easy-to-use exercise prescription pad plus other helpful resources. Visit www.exerciseismedicine.org/support_page.php/health-care-providers for more information.



5-STAR METRIC: URINARY INCONTINENCE

HOS Survey Questions

- Q:** Many people experience problems with urinary incontinence, the leakage of urine. In the past six months, have you accidentally leaked urine?
- Q:** How much of a problem, if any, was the urine leakage for you?
- Q:** Have you talked with your current doctor or other health provider about your urine leakage problem?
- Q:** There are many ways to treat urinary incontinence including bladder training, exercises, medication and surgery. Have you ever talked with a doctor, nurse or other healthcare provider about any of these approaches?

Recommendations

- Encourage nursing staff and medical assistants to ask patients about any incidents of urinary incontinence in the past six months. Patients are often too embarrassed to initiate the discussion.
- Educate patients about noninvasive behavioral interventions for urinary incontinence; when necessary, refer for appropriate treatment.



5-STAR METRIC: IMPROVING OR MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH

HOS Survey Questions

- Q:** During the past four weeks, have you had any of the following problems with your work or other regular activities as a result of any emotional problems (such as feeling depressed or anxious)?
- a) Accomplished less than you would like as a result of any emotional problems
 - b) Didn't do work or other activities as carefully as usual as a result of any emotional problems
- Q:** These questions are about how you feel and how things have been with you during the past four weeks. How much time during the past four weeks:
- a) Have you felt calm and peaceful?
 - b) Did you have a lot of energy?
 - c) Have you felt downhearted and blue?
- Q:** During the past four weeks, how much of the time has your physical health or emotional problems interfered with your social activities (like visiting with friends, relatives, etc.)?

Recommendations

- Consider screening for cognitive impairment, dementia and depression (PHQ9 screening).
- Assess and discuss mental health status at every appointment, whether or not the patient screens positive for a mental health condition.
- Refer patients to a mental health provider for counseling and further evaluation when appropriate.
- If the patient screens positive for a mental health-related issue, determine if they have an adequate support system involved in their care.



5-STAR METRIC: REDUCING RISK OF FALLING

HOS Survey Questions

- Q:** A fall is when your body goes to the ground without being pushed. In the past 12 months, did you talk with your doctor or other health provider about falling or problems with balance or walking?
- Q:** Has your doctor or other health provider done anything to help prevent falls or treat problems with balance or walking? Some things they might do include:
- a) Suggest that you use a cane or walker
 - b) Check your blood pressure lying and standing
 - c) Suggest that you do an exercise or physical therapy program
 - d) Suggest a vision or hearing test

Recommendations

- Use resources in the CDC's STEADI Tool Kit to assess, treat and refer older adult patients based on their fall risk. Visit www.cdc.gov/steady/index.html for more information.
- Conduct a medication review with patients. Some medications or combinations of medications can have side effects like dizziness or drowsiness that increase fall risk.
- Encourage annual eye exams and regular prescription updates for glasses/contact lenses.
- Consider gradually withdrawing psychotropic medication and modifying other prescriptions, as appropriate, to reduce fall risk.
- Consider referral to a home health occupational/physical therapist for home safety evaluation and modification (e.g., hand rails in the shower, using a cane or walker).
- Encourage exercise, specifically those that increase leg strength and balance.

If you have questions or would like additional information about the Medicare Star measures, please send inquiries to MedicareStarRating@blueshieldca.com.



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