

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Dialysis Facility Compare Star Ratings

### General

- **What is the purpose of Star Ratings?**

CMS created the star ratings for the Dialysis Facility Compare (DFC) website in order to provide to consumers a summary of the quality data reported on the website. Star ratings will allow consumers to more easily compare dialysis facilities by providing an easily understood summary of quality performance. CMS selected the quality measures for the star ratings to provide as comprehensive a picture of quality at the facility level as is possible, given available data.

- **What do the Star Ratings add to information already reported on DFC?**

The results of multiple individual quality measures can be difficult to understand when attempting to compare facilities to one another. Star Ratings will provide a more easily understandable summary of the DFC measure results in a format that is increasingly familiar to consumers.

- **Do Star Ratings provide all the information needed to choose a dialysis facility?**

The DFC Star Rating is one of many sources of information consumers should use to decide which facilities to go to for their care. CMS encourages consumers to use the ratings, along with the other information on DFC, to learn about the quality of facilities and the services they offer, compare dialysis facilities side-by-side, and ask quality-related questions when visiting a dialysis facility. Consumers should also talk to their doctors about their choices, talk to the staff, and talk to people they know who may be on dialysis. We recommend that consumers discuss the star ratings and other quality information on the website when they talk with their doctors about where to get dialysis care, and when they visit dialysis facilities.

Consumers who already receive dialysis at a facility should also speak with their doctor and facility staff if they have any questions about their facility's star rating, or the underlying measure information.

- **When Star Ratings are added to Dialysis Facility Compare, will any of the information about the DFC measures be removed from the website?**

No. The measure information for the individual DFC Quality Measures used to calculate the Star Ratings will continue to be displayed on the website and the downloadable database when the Star Ratings are added to the website.

- **How often will Star Ratings be updated?**

CMS plans to update the Star Ratings on Dialysis Facility Compare annually. CMS uses the same data for Star Ratings as it does to publicly report the quality measures on the Dialysis Facility Compare website. The first display of the Star Ratings will take place in January 2015. We

expect that the first annual refresh with updated data of the Star Ratings will occur in October 2015, with annual updates thereafter.

- **Where do the data for Star Ratings come from?**

CMS calculates Star Ratings using the quality measures that is currently on DFC which CMS collects from dialysis facilities. For more information about the data please see <http://www.medicare.gov/DialysisFacilityCompare/Data/Data-Sources.html> .

### **Quality Measures Used in the DFC Star Ratings**

- **Which DFC quality measures will be used to calculate the Star Ratings?**

A total of 9 DFC quality measures will be used for Star Ratings:

- Standardized Mortality Ratio (SMR) (NQF #0369)
- Standardized Hospitalization Ratio (SHR) (NQF #1463)
- Standardized Transfusion Ratio (STrR)
- Percentage of adult hemodialysis (HD) patients who had enough wastes removed from their blood during dialysis (NQF #0249)
- Percentage of pediatric hemodialysis (HD) patients who had enough wastes removed from their blood during dialysis (NQF #1423)
- Percentage of adult peritoneal dialysis (PD) patients who had enough wastes removed from their blood during dialysis (NQF #0318)
- Percentage of adult dialysis patients who had hypercalcemia (NQF #1454)
- Percentage of adult dialysis patients who received treatment through arteriovenous fistula (NQF #0257)
- Percentage of adult patients who had a catheter left in vein longer than 90 days for their regular hemodialysis treatment (NQF #0256)

For the Star Ratings, the adult HD, adult PD, and pediatric HD adequacy measures are combined and scored as one measure.

- **How are the DFC quality measures grouped to calculate the Star Ratings?**

An analytical method called principal factor analysis was used to identify domains for grouping the quality measures. Three empirically derived groups (domains) were found to match to related outcomes at the facility level. The three domains are:

- “Standardized Outcomes (SHR, SMR, STTrR)” which includes measures for hospitalization, mortality and transfusions
- “Other Outcomes 1 (AV fistula, tunneled catheter)” which includes the arteriovenous fistula and catheter > 90 days measures

- “Other Outcomes 2 (Kt/V, hypercalcemia)” which includes the combined HD and PD adequacy measure (Kt/V) and the hypercalcemia measure.

## **Dialysis Facility Compare – Eligible Facilities**

- **Which dialysis facilities are included in Star Ratings?**

All Medicare-participating dialysis facilities that have sufficient data to be reported on DFC are eligible to receive a star rating. This includes all dialysis facilities with valid data reported for at least one measure in each measure domain.

- **Why did some dialysis facilities not receive a Star Rating?**

In order to receive a Star Rating, a dialysis facility must have sufficient data to calculate DFC measure results. If a dialysis facility had missing values in most of the measures, a Star Rating could not be calculated. Not being rated does not necessarily mean that a dialysis facility did not report data on a measure or measures. The dialysis facility could be new, small, only provide care to PD or pediatric patients, or have too few Medicare claims. On the DFC website, when a measure is not available, one of these 9 reasons is provided and patients are urged to contact the dialysis facility to discuss the measure and get more information.

1. The number of patients is too small to report.
2. The facility did not report the data.
3. CMS determined that the percentage was not accurate.
4. The facility was not open for the entire reporting period.
5. The facility does not provide hemodialysis.
6. The facility does not provide hemodialysis to pediatric patients.
7. The facility does not provide peritoneal dialysis.
8. The facility did not report enough quality measure data to calculate a Star Rating.
9. CMS determined that at least one measure included in the Star Rating calculation was not accurate for this facility

- **Do peritoneal dialysis-only facilities receive a Star Rating?**

PD-Only dialysis facilities will be scored and given a star rating by averaging only the “Standardized Outcomes” and “Other Outcomes 2” domains. This is because PD – Only facilities are not included in the calculation of the measures included in the “Other Outcomes 1” domain.

- **Do pediatric dialysis facilities receive a Star Rating?**

Dialysis facilities that only treat pediatric patients do not receive Star Ratings because pediatric patients are systematically excluded from certain quality measures on DFC given the small number of pediatric patients with ESRD and these measures make up the star rating. This is an issue of particular concern to CMS because of the vulnerable nature of this population, and CMS is continuing to investigate ways in which quality measures and other sources of information

may be used to provide a rating for these facilities in the future that adequately reflects the quality of care provided for their patients.

### Methodology of DFC Star Ratings

- **How are DFC Star Ratings assigned for each measure?**

Star Ratings are based on the average of the scores of the three domains of DFC quality measures, with some measures weighted more heavily than others. Weights are applied using an analytic method called factor analysis that identifies groups of correlated quality measures. Different weights are used in order to avoid some measures contributing too heavily to the score for a group of measures. For instance, if 4 related quality measures measure a certain aspect of care and only 1 quality measure assesses a second aspect of care, a simple average of the 5 quality measures would count the first aspect of care much more heavily than the second.

For more details, please see the [Technical Notes on the Dialysis Facility Compare Star Rating System](#) available at [www.dialysisdata.org](http://www.dialysisdata.org).

- **How many dialysis facilities are in each of the Star Rating categories?**

Dialysis facility scores on the DFC quality measures were naturally distributed in a bell-shaped curve, with roughly equal percentages of facilities falling above and below the national average score. This is reflected in the following Star Rating categories.

Facilities with:

- The top 10% final scores were given 5 stars
- The next 20% highest final scores were given 4 stars
- The middle 40% of final scores were given 3 stars
- The next 20% lowest final scores were given 2 stars
- Bottom 10% final scores were given 1 star

- **Where can I get more information about the DFC Star Rating methodology?**

For more details, please see the [Technical Notes on the Dialysis Facility Compare Star Rating System](#) available at [www.dialysisdata.org](http://www.dialysisdata.org).

### DFC Star Ratings and the ESRD Quality Incentive Program (QIP)

- **Do Star Ratings impact our ESRD QIP Score?**

No. CMS does not use DFC Star Ratings in the ESRD QIP program and the Star Ratings will have no impact on the QIP Score or dialysis facility payment.

- **Our dialysis facility received a good score for the ESRD QIP, so why did we receive only 2 stars on DFC?**

There are some reasons why a good QIP score may not result in an average or above average star rating. One reason is that several measures that are used in the DFC Star Rating are not

used in the QIP program. For example, the SMR, SHR, and STrR are only used in the DFC Star Rating. Another reason is that a facility may have made substantial improvement in the past year, based on the QIP performance standards for improvement. Under the DFC star rating, which compares facilities to the national average, it is possible that even though the facility's performance improved, a facility's performance may still fall below the national average for that measure and therefore receive a lower-star rating. Additionally, the QIP score incorporates reporting measures, which measure the reporting of data, rather than facility performance on quality measures. The Star Rating uses only facility performance on measures in its methodology.

- **Do DFC Star Ratings account for improvement?**

No. The DFC Star Ratings do not use historical data from previous years and do not account for improvement in the ratings. Instead, CMS bases the DFC Star Rating on the comparison of facility performance in the current year to a national average for each measure.

### **New DFC Quality Measures**

- Are there any changes in the quality measures that will be available on Dialysis Facility Compare, beginning on January 2015?
  - Two Best Treatment Practices Quality Measures—Urea Reduction Ratio (URR)  $\geq$  65% and hemoglobin > 12.0 g/dL—will be removed from DFC.
  - The Standardized Readmission Ratio (SRR) will be added to the DFC.
  - Hemoglobin > 12.0 g/dL will remain in the DFC downloadable database on Medicare.data.gov.

- Will removing the URR > 65% and hemoglobin > 12.0 g/dL, Quality Measures affect my Star Rating?

No, the Star Rating will not include those two measures because they were topped out.

- Why are URR and hemoglobin quality measures being removed?

The URR and hemoglobin quality measures are being removed from the Dialysis Facility Compare site because they are topped out. The national average for URR  $\geq$  65% is 99%; for hemoglobin > 12 g/dL, it is < 1%.

- Will the SRR quality measure affect my Star Rating?

No, the SRR will not be included in the initial release of the star ratings in January 2015. It, and other measures added to DFC in the future may be included in future releases of the DFC star ratings following consideration by the TEP and CMS.