



2625 Butterfield Road, Suite 102E  
Oak Brook, Illinois 60523-1234  
(800) 386-6431  
Fax (630) 571-5611

**Media Contact:**

Lara R. Jackson  
(630) 928-5869  
ljackson@ilqio.sdps.org

**Illinois Foundation for Quality Health Care Assists Home Health Agencies  
in the Reduction of Acute Care Hospitalizations**

**OAK BROOK, Ill., July 5, 2007** – The Illinois Foundation for Quality Health Care (IFQHC) has been actively assisting home health agencies to reduce hospitalizations for home health patients. Currently, 52 percent or 395 home health agencies in the state are participating in a year long Home Health Quality Improvement National Campaign that began in January 2007. The goal of the campaign is to reduce the occurrence of avoidable acute care hospitalizations (ACH) on the national and state level. Hospitalization can create unnecessary financial and emotional worries; most people would prefer to stay at home whenever possible rather than being admitted into a nursing home or hospital.

IFQHC offers assistance to home health agencies through education and training, providing free tools and resources and one-on-one consulting concerning the agency's plans of action. IFQHC teaches ACH best practices to agencies, which include:

- Risk assessment tools
- Emergency care plans
- Patient self-management
- Medication management
- Home telehealth/phone monitoring

With IFQHC's assistance, many home health agencies throughout the state have shown great improvements in the reduction of ACHs. One such agency is OSF Home Care Division, which has five Illinois locations in Bloomington, Peoria, Galesburg, Pontiac and Rockford. Since the start of the campaign, OSF's St. Joseph's Center for Home Care in Bloomington has consistently been at least 10 percent below the state average for ACH. One way the agency has achieved this is by developing an action plan, which served as a reminder for family members who became more active participants in their family member's health care. The plan also helped clinicians stay informed about their patient's medical history.

According to Nancy Bracken, performance improvement and education manager at OSF, “When this plan was set up, the rates in Bloomington improved. This plan was used to monitor avoidable acute care hospitalizations and help patients.”

Another agency that has shown improvement reducing incidents is the JoDaviess County Health Department Home Health Care in Galena. JoDaviess reduced ACH incidents by 6 percent overall. “Due to the heightened awareness of acute care hospitalizations, we began seeing improvements immediately,” states Home Health Coordinator Allison Gilles, RN, BSN, COS-C. “We developed a risk assessment tool that helped identify patients who scored 10 or higher on the scale.” This score helps the agency identify the patients that need closer monitoring.”

According to Gilles the use of this tool resulted in phoning the patients. In one instance, a caregiver called the agency because her husband was having difficulty breathing. The agency was able to send a nurse to check on the patient, which resulted in a visit to a physician’s office who in turn prescribed additional treatments implemented by the agency. The patient’s condition greatly improved and he was able to return home rather than being readmitted to the hospital.

Comprehensive Quality Care, Inc., located in Chicago, has seen its ACH numbers decrease by 5 percent over the past six months. According to Faith Hardiman, RN, nursing supervisor at Comprehensive, a method that worked best was built around a simple magnet and sticker given to patients. The magnets state “Emergency Plan – Avoid Acute Hospitalizations” and the stickers say “Stop: Did You Call Your Nurse?” The magnets and stickers have been in use for three months.

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Located in Oak Brook, Ill., IFQHC is the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) for the state of Illinois. QIOs work with physicians and health care professionals to promote high quality medical care for Medicare beneficiaries. IFQHC is contracted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to perform designated quality improvement activities with healthcare providers across Illinois. For more information on IFQHC, visit our Web site at [www.ifqhc.org](http://www.ifqhc.org).