

Center for Medicaid and State Operations/Survey and Certification Group

Ref: S&C-05-22

DATE: March 10, 2005

TO: State Survey Agency Directors

FROM: Director
Survey and Certification Group

SUBJECT: **Nursing Homes and Home Health Agencies** - Updated Facility Computer Specifications

Letter Summary

- New architecture structure and software requires new minimum system requirements for access to the Quality Improvement and Evaluation System (QIES).
- Nursing homes (NHs) and home health agencies (HHAs) in your states should meet the new minimum system requirements listed in this memo by December 31, 2005.

Need for Facilities to Upgrade their Personal Computers (PCs)

The Quality Net (QNet) is in the process of complying with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS') mandated 3-tiered architecture structure and the use of new QNet approved reporting software. The new architecture and software require new minimum system requirements (outlined in Chart 1 below) for users to access the QIES-to-Success Web site.

CMS is scheduled to transition to this new reporting software in January 2006. In addition, much of the software that supports the submission of patient assessments and facility reporting - for example, the NH quality indicator (QI) and HHA outcome (OBQI) reports, and the submission and error reports - will be upgraded to current software versions. As CMS proceeds with plans to perform these needed upgrades to the reporting software, we find that many facilities have very old computer equipment.

Nearly 15,000 NHs responded to a CMS survey about their computer configuration. The survey findings show that about 1/3 of the NH computers are too old to support the new versions of reporting software. Many NHs have not upgraded their computers since the 1998 MDS submission requirements.

The new reporting software will also affect HHAs. Although they weren't surveyed, it is likely there are a large number of HHAs that also have older computers.

Chart 1 below shows the minimum system requirements that are needed in NHs and HHAs to support the reporting upgrades CMS plans to deploy in January 2006. We are requesting the state survey agencies (SA) inform the NHs and HHAs of the need to ensure their computers meet the minimum system requirements. CMS will post notices on the QIES state system and on the QTSO website. NHs and HHAs will not be able to get their needed reports in the future unless they meet these requirements.

When are upgrades needed?

January 2006 is the targeted timeframe for new reporting software to be installed. NHs and HHAs need their PCs to meet the minimum requirements listed in Chart 1 by December 31, 2005. **Please make sure your providers are made aware of these new system requirements.**

What is the impact to Nursing Homes and Home Health Agencies?

If NHs and HHAs don't have PCs meeting the minimum system requirements, they will not be able to access the upgraded QI/OBQI and the error and submission reports.

CHART 1 - End User Minimum PC system requirements:	
CPU:	Pentium 3, 500 MHz
Memory:	256 Mb
Operating System:	Windows 2000 or XP
Hard Drive:	500 Mb free space
Browser:	Internet Explorer v5.5 SP2

Questions about the instructions in this memorandum should be addressed to Lori Anderson at 410-786-6190 or via email at LAnderson1@cms.hhs.gov.

Effective Date: The information in this memorandum should be shared within 30 days of the publication date.

Training: The information contained in this announcement should be shared with the NHs and HHAs in your states, QIES coordinators and survey staff, their managers and the state/RO training coordinators.

/s/
Thomas E. Hamilton

cc: Survey and Certification Regional Office Management (G-5)