

Medicare adds star ratings for dialysis center comparison

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Medicare is adding a visual tool to help kidney patients compare the quality of dialysis centers: Star ratings.

Medicare's online Dialysis Facility Compare already included quality information such as whether patient death and hospitalization rates were higher than expected. But it says that information wasn't always easy for [patients](#) to understand.

On Thursday, Medicare added an extra rating category, giving a facility one to five stars based on some of those quality measurements, as it has long rated nursing homes

About 430,000 people in the U.S. are on dialysis, according to the National Kidney Foundation. There are different types of dialysis, but the most common is being hooked to a blood-filtering machine in a [dialysis center](#) three days a week. Many people choose a facility close to home or one recommended by their kidney specialist.

The star ratings provide additional information, but they're not the only thing to consider, said Dr. Kate Goodrich, Medicare's quality measurement director. Low-scoring facilities should consider the rating an incentive to improve, she said—especially if, as Medicare officials hope, patients ask about quality measures.

For example, specialists agree that a catheter placed into a vein usually should be for short-term dialysis access, because longer use risks

infection. Yet Medicare's data shows wide variation in how many patients retain catheters for 90 days or more. Goodrich called that a target for improvement, and something patients should discuss with their health providers.

Some kidney groups are urging changes to the system. The National Kidney Foundation said in a statement Thursday that the stars might not truly reflect a facility's quality. For example, a foundation survey found patients consider the attentiveness of [dialysis](#) staff a key quality measure, something not included in the initial ratings.

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