

Many hospitals being penalized for 30-day readmissions

7 August 2015



"While we appreciate these comments and the importance of the role that sociodemographic status plays in the care of patients, we continue to have concerns about holding hospitals to different standards for the outcomes of their patients of low sociodemographic status," the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services states in newly released regulations.

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(HealthDay)—About half of the nation's hospitals are being penalized by Medicare for having patients return within a month of discharge, losing a combined \$420 million, according to a report published by Kaiser Health.

Starting in October, 2,592 hospitals will receive lower payments for every Medicare patient who stays in the hospital, regardless of readmission. Although national readmission rates have decreased since the fines began, about one in five Medicare patients return to the [hospital](#) within a month.

The fines will be applied to Medicare payments at the start of the federal fiscal year in October and are based on readmissions between July 2011 and June 2014. The average Medicare payment reduction is 0.61 percent per patient stay in this round, and 38 hospitals will receive the maximum penalty of 3 percent. Five hundred six hospitals will lose 1 percent or more of their Medicare payments. Hospitals have been lobbying Medicare and Congress to account for the [socioeconomic background](#) of patients when assessing readmission penalties, arguing that some factors for readmission, such ability to afford medications, are beyond their control.

APA citation: Many hospitals being penalized for 30-day readmissions (2015, August 7) retrieved 13 October 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-hospitals-penalized-day-readmissions.html>

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