

How Do Publicly Reported Medicare Quality Metrics for Radiologists Compare With Those of Other Specialty Groups?

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Abstract

Purpose: To characterize and compare the performance of radiologists in Medicare's new Physician Compare Initiative with that of other provider groups.

Methods: CMS Physician Compare data were obtained for all 900,334 health care providers (including 30,614 radiologists) enrolled in Medicare in early 2015. All publicly reported metrics were compared among eight provider categories (radiologists, pathologists, primary care, other medical subspecialists, surgeons, all other physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants, and all other nonphysicians).

Results: Overall radiologist satisfaction of all six Physician Compare Initiative metrics differed significantly from that of nonradiologists (all $P \leq .005$): acceptance of Medicare-approved amount as payment in full, 75.8% versus 85.0%; Electronic Prescribing, 11.2% versus 25.1%; Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS), 60.5% versus 39.4%; electronic health record participation, 15.8% versus 25.4%; receipt of the PQRS Maintenance of Certification Program Incentive, 4.7% versus 0.3%; and Million Hearts initiative participation, 0.007% versus 0.041%. Among provider categories, radiologists and pathologists demonstrated the highest and second-highest performance levels, respectively, for the two metrics (PQRS and MOC) with specialty-specific designs, but they ranked between fifth and eighth in all remaining non-specialty-specific metrics.

Conclusions: The performance of radiologists and pathologists in Medicare's Physician Compare Initiative may relate to the extent to which metrics are tailored to the distinct aspects of their practices as diagnostic information specialists. If more physician participation in these programs is desired, more meaningful specialty-specific (rather than generic) metrics are encouraged.

Key Words: Radiologists, Medicare, quality, metrics, physicians

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INTRODUCTION

In a health care environment in which patient engagement is given higher priority than ever before, public reporting of objective physician-specific data is increasingly important to patients seeking to compare providers as they pursue high-quality care [1,2]. Such transparency has entailed

more intensive tracking of physician performance with the goals of increased physician accountability and improved quality and health outcomes [3]. Patients are increasingly demonstrating an interest in selecting hospitals and physicians based on various objective and perceived metrics of quality [3,4]. The dissemination of accurate and appropriate physician performance data thus serves as a mechanism for facilitating informed patient decision-making [5].

Aligned with these themes of enabling patients to make informed health care choices, the Affordable Care Act required that CMS make information publicly available that relates to physician performance that would allow comparisons based on quality of care [6]. In response, through its Physician Compare Initiative, CMS established its Physician Compare website in December 2010, to provide freely available searchable data about physicians enrolled in the Medicare program [7]. Physician Compare includes background information regarding enrolled providers (such

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as credentials, medical or other professional school, year of graduation, primary and secondary specialties, and practice affiliations), as well as information regarding their participation in various voluntary Medicare initiatives intended to improve quality of care [7]. Since the launch of the Physician Compare website, CMS has gradually expanded the information available and intends to continue incorporating additional metrics with the goal of helping users “find and choose physicians and other health care professionals enrolled in Medicare so that you can make informed choices about the health care you get” [7].

Likely because of the recency of implementation of the initiative, rigorous studies of reported physician performance under the Physician Compare Initiative are lacking in the peer-reviewed literature. Such investigations are necessary to evaluate the overall utility and clinical relevance of the provided data, as well as to identify opportunities for more meaningful metric reporting. Given patients’ trust in the provided information [3], critical evaluation of website content is essential to guiding ongoing evolution and optimization of the Physician Compare Initiative. Still unknown is whether metrics pertaining to medical practice in general are appropriate for various subspecialty groups.

As diagnostic information specialists, radiologists, like pathologists, are different from other providers in that their primary work product is usually diagnostic information rather than treatment. This distinction has led to questions regarding whether earlier health care quality metrics appropriately apply to radiologists [8]. To address this information gap, we sought to characterize and compare the performance of radiologists in Medicare’s Physician Compare Initiative with that of other provider groups.

METHODS

This retrospective HIPAA-compliant study was approved by our institutional review board with a waiver of written informed consent. The periodically updated Physician Compare online dataset includes information about all health care providers enrolled in the Medicare program. Data for all Physician Compare quality metrics for all enrolled providers were obtained from CMS in May 2015 [7]. Although individual providers may have duplicative database entries if they have multiple enrollments and/or single enrollments associated with multiple practice location addresses, the performance metrics assessed in this study are identical for any individual provider across all of his/her entries.

Utilizing uniquely assigned National Provider Identifier information associated with all 2,003,419 provider

entries, we isolated nonduplicative data for 900,334 unique providers for our analysis. We classified providers into one of eight categories based on the “primary specialty” designated within the CMS database: (1) radiologists (primary specialty of “diagnostic radiology,” “nuclear medicine,” or “interventional radiology”) (n = 30,614); (2) pathologists (n = 11,326); (3) primary care (n = 193,291); (4) nonprimary care medical subspecialists (n = 106,484); (5) surgeons (n = 80,610); (6) all other physicians (n = 152,265); (7) nurse practitioners and physician assistants (n = 76,848); and (8) all other nonphysician providers (n = 248,895).

Each providers’ status regarding six Medicare initiatives was recorded in the Physician Compare dataset: acceptance of the Medicare Assignment; participation in the Medicare Electronic Prescribing (eRx) Incentive Program; participation in the Medicare Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS) Incentive Program; participation in the Medicare Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Program; receipt of the PQRS Maintenance of Certification Program Incentive (MOC); and participation in the Million Hearts Initiative (MHI). [Table 1](#) provides further information about all six initiatives. The status for each metric was identified in data we obtained for each provider. The overall performance for each of the six metrics was calculated for each of the eight provider categories and summarized as a graphic. Next, the fraction of providers satisfying each of the six metrics was compared, for radiologists versus all other providers combined, using χ^2 analysis. The ranking among the eight provider categories in each of the six metrics was recorded for radiologists and pathologists (representing physician categories specializing in diagnostic information services), and the specialty having the highest percentage of satisfaction was recorded for each metric. Finally, the number of radiologists and all other providers combined that satisfy varying numbers of the six metrics, as well as at least three of the six metrics, was computed and compared using χ^2 analysis.

Statistical evaluation was performed using Microsoft Excel for Mac 2011, Version 14.3.5 (Microsoft, Redmond, Washington) and MedCalc for Windows, Version 9.1 (MedCalc Software, Ostend, Belgium).

RESULTS

[Figure 1](#) depicts providers’ performance in each of the six Physician Compare metrics, stratified by the eight provider categories. Radiologists’ overall metric satisfaction, in comparison with the corresponding overall nonradiologist metric satisfaction, was as follows ([Table 2](#)): acceptance of the approved Medicare assignment as payment in full

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