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VA improves health care facility performance transparency

Move makes it easier for Veterans to compare VA, non-VA health care facilities

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) announced Dec. 11, key changes to increase transparency and ensure Veterans have the best information regarding the performance of VA health care facilities.

As part of this effort, VA will discontinue its star-rating system, making it easier for Veterans to compare VA facilities with non-VA facilities

in their local area.

“Star ratings were developed as an internal tool meant to compare one VA facility to another,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These ratings do not provide insight as to how our hospitals stack up against nearby non-VA facilities and are therefore of little value in helping Veterans make informed health care decisions. This change will make it easier for Veterans to choose the best possible care close to home, when and where they need it.”

The website home page for each VA hospital now features links to comparative tools relating to wait times, quality of medical care and patient experience ratings. This information is drawn from quality-of-care measures provided by industry-standard sources including, but not limited to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, National Committee for Quality Assurance and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Star ratings are often misinterpreted, as they compare VA facilities by ranking them across the department’s health care system, rather than by geography, population characteristics or unique care offerings. Additionally, Veterans in VA focus groups have indicated they do not consult the star ratings in making decisions about VA care.

The [National Quality Forum](#)’s, Nov. 6, issue brief, Hospital Quality Star Rating Summit, points out, star ratings of health care facilities can often misrepresent an assessment of overall hospital quality, “leading consumers to choose hospitals that were not the best at delivering the care they needed...when they might have been the best place for a person with a particular condition to receive care.”

While VA has published star ratings for the final time, the department will continue to make public its own detailed, [Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning \(SAIL\)](#) data, to monitor and internally manage hospital system performance within the Veterans Health Administration. SAIL assesses more than 60 quality metrics in areas such as death rates, complications, safety and patient satisfaction, as well as overall efficiency and physician capacity at individual VA Medical Centers.

In accordance with Government Accountability Office recommendations, in [2017](#) and [2019](#), these changes will help Veterans navigate the many new choices available to them under the [MISSION Act](#), a landmark law that puts Veterans at the center of their health care decisions.

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