

4-29-19

8 Allegheny County nursing homes get top marks in new ratings

By Gary Rotstein
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The federal government has updated its website used to rate nursing homes with new methodology that it says will better serve consumers, more accurately accounting for the facilities' inspections, staffing and other measures.

While tinkering with the

formula for its Nursing Home Compare website, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services still uses a scale from one to five stars to rate more than 15,000 facilities. Nursing homes receive both an overall star rating and sub-ratings for how they stack up on their staffing levels; their performance on state health inspections; and a combined group of quality

measures accounting for care issues such as the percentage of patients with pain, sores, incontinence and hospitalizations.

The new ratings posted Wednesday for 61 nursing homes in Allegheny County show eight facilities with five-star ratings, 21 receiving four stars, 20 with three stars, nine given two stars, and three with one star. Beyond the

star system, a range of detailed information about different aspects of care — plus state inspection histories — is available by entering a facility's name in the website's search field.

The local five-star homes are Harmony Physical Rehabilitation in Monroeville, Little Sisters of

SEE RATE, PAGE B-2

8 county nursing homes get top ratings

RATE, FROM B-1

the Poor in Brighton Heights, North Hills Health and Rehabilitation Center in Pine, Providence Point Healthcare Residence in Scott, UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital Transitional Unit, UPMC McKeesport Long Term Care Facility, Vincentian de Marillac in Stanton Heights, and West Hills Health and Rehabilitation Center in Moon.

The one-star facilities are Baldwin Health Center, Cheswick Rehabilitation and Wellness Center and the Corner View Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (formerly Forbes Center for Rehabilitation and Healthcare) in Larimer.

In many cases, the local nursing homes receiving the highest rating are smaller, nonprofit homes — with fewer than 75 beds —

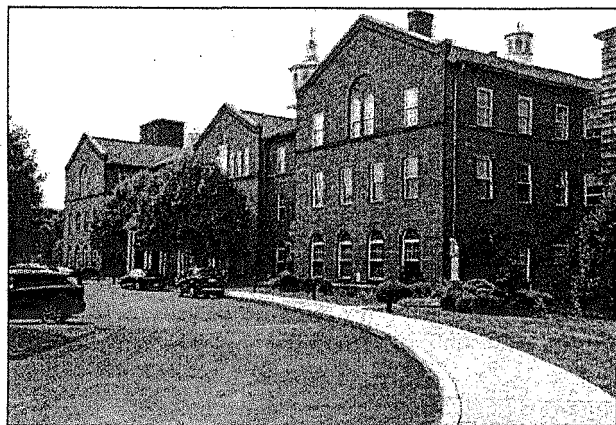
while the three one-star homes are all for-profit operations with at least 121 beds.

Allegheny County owns and operates four nursing homes in its Kane system. Its Glen Hazel and Scott facilities received three stars while the McKeesport and Ross operations have two stars.

The federal government created Nursing Home Compare in 2008 as a way to assist consumers in what can be a difficult decision-making process. Individuals and families often have little time to evaluate whatever facilities may be located near them or which may be suggested by a hospital social worker or other health care professional.

Industry officials raised concerns last week that the update to Nursing Home Compare could be confusing, as new methodology may have caused some facilities' ratings to drop even though their levels of care and staffing may be same as before the update. The Pennsylvania Health Care Association, which represents many for-profit homes, reported that more than 30 percent of nursing homes in the state suddenly lost one or more stars.

"While the five-star system can be a helpful tool, families should not rely on it exclusively when choosing a nursing home for a loved one," association president Zach Shamberg said.



Nate Guidry/Post-Gazette

The Little Sisters of the Poor nursing home in Brighton Heights is one of eight in Allegheny County currently with a five-star rating — the highest — on the federal government's Nursing Home Compare website.

Richard Mollot, executive director of the Long Term Care Community Coalition, a national consumer advocacy group, agreed that Nursing Home Compare should not be the only decision-making guide, because people would benefit from visiting homes for firsthand assessments of resident engagement, interactions with staff, dining, odors and other aspects.

But for objective data, Mr. Mollot said, Nursing Home Compare is better than any other source, and that the federal government has worked to fine-tune and improve the information over the years. Among recent changes, he said, are more reliable information about staffing levels and an

inspection process that calls for surveyors to interact more with residents and observe operations rather than relying too much on paperwork and interviews with administrators.

Mr. Mollot cautioned, however, that research has suggested that the website's star system is better at identifying which facilities to avoid than which to use.

"Obviously, go for the highest star rating possible, but don't count on one with four or five stars necessarily being a great facility. The system just doesn't work that way," he said, because state inspections vary in their accuracy and facilities still self-report a quantity of data about patient care that may not be reliable.

"I would, honestly, try to find any other possible situation over a place with one or two stars," Mr. Mollot said. "And if I had time to visit, go and see how the residents are treated, whether call bells are being answered, whether residents are slumped over in wheelchairs in the hallway or are engaged, check how it smells. These are things you can see in a pretty quick visit."

Gary Rotstein: grotstein@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1255.