

Missouri Association of Homes for the Aging

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To the Editor:

Your story on CMS' five-star rating system for nursing homes reinforces the need for government and providers to work together and ensure quality of care.

We support a consumer-friendly nursing home rating system based on reliable quality information that the public can understand. The five-star rating system is a great idea but poorly planned and prematurely implemented.

The federal government has a key responsibility for defining quality based on data that is accurate, reliable, timely and friendly. This is essential for the public to trust not only nursing homes but also the rating system itself.

Together, government and providers must be responsible, transparent and accountable for taking care of vulnerable seniors. Consumers deserve nothing less than a reliable seal of approval for the best nursing homes in America.

We recommend that consumers use the new rating system with caution, and only as an aid while also pursuing other information. An on-site visit is a must. Observing staff and resident interaction and determining how quickly management responds to concerns are just two examples to review. Talking to current residents in the nursing home and community members about the reputation of any health care provider is essential. Consumers need to understand that the five-star system is a beginning, not an end.

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