

## **NMMRA's Success Continues**

by Christine Beechhold, Communications Specialist  
New Mexico Medical Review Association

Good news all around! The New Mexico Medical Review Association (NMMRA), the state's Medicare health care Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) earned the right to non-competitive renewal of another three-year federal contract with the Centers of Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). According to Barry Straube, MD, director of the CMS Office of Clinical Standards and Quality, "NMMRA achieved a level of performance that met or exceeded published standards for each contract task, making it eligible for non-competitive renewal."

Randy Marshall, executive director of the New Mexico Medical Society and a member of NMMRA's Board of Directors said, "I find it particularly gratifying to learn that NMMRA's continuous efforts to improve health care in the state have been recognized and are valued by CMS and that NMMRA will continue in its role as a key health care resource within this state."

NMMRA was awarded this nearly \$8.5 million contract effective November 1, 2005, and has been working on a number of quality improvement projects in the areas of nursing homes, home health agencies, hospitals, and physician offices, and more recently with health plans and pharmacists. In addition, NMMRA maintains a statewide, seven-day-a-week help line for Medicare beneficiaries and their families to ask for quality of care reviews and to handle appeals related to discharges from hospitals and discontinuation of coverage determinations related to nursing home, home health and hospital care.

"In my more than 20 years' experience working with federal peer review and quality improvement contracts, this was by far the most challenging contract," said Dan Jaco, NMMRA's chief executive officer (CEO). "The fact that 25 percent of such contractors around the country initially failed the evaluation highlights the complexity of the work and at the same time highlights the stellar performance of the NMMRA staff."

Upon learning of NMMRA's contract results, Jeff Dye, president and CEO of the New Mexico Hospital Association said, "We are very pleased to learn of NMMRA's well-deserved performance review and contract renewal with CMS. NMMRA is a vital partner with our association and our member hospitals as we all strive to deliver the best possible health care and health outcomes to New Mexicans."

NMMRA staff members are currently working on the set of proposals that will form the major content of the new contract, slated to begin August 1, 2008. In the upcoming contract, NMMRA anticipates conducting continuing projects in prevention, patient safety, disparities and beneficiary protection within communities in the state across the full range of health care.

In addition to NMMRA's contract renewal, NMMRA also received high marks from New Mexico's providers for its quality improvement efforts. This past fall, CMS released the results of independent surveys in every state. The surveys, conducted by Maryland-based Westat, a national

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survey research firm retained by CMS, addressed health care provider satisfaction with each state’s federally designated QIO. This survey was part of the overall evaluation criteria of the QIO program. To pass this portion of the QIO contract evaluation, individual QIOs had to receive 80 percent or better in each of five task areas: nursing homes, home health agencies, hospitals (two components), and physician offices. NMMRA scored well above the minimum requirements, achieving four scores between 90 percent and 95 percent and a fifth score of 87 percent.

As the table below reflects, NMMRA scored above the national average in three of the task categories, including the second highest score in the country for its disparities work with physician offices.

<b>Setting/Task Area</b>	<b>Range of National Scores (%)</b>	<b>National Averages (%)</b>	<b>NMMRA Scores (%)</b>
Home Health	86 to 97	93	95
Hospitals	85 to 98	92	93
Hospitals (critical access and rural)	82 to 98	93	90
Physician Offices (disparities)	72 to 93	87	92
Nursing Homes	73 to 95	89	87

Joie Glenn, RN, MBA, CAE, executive director of the New Mexico Association for Home and Hospice Care, one of NMMRA’s many partners in improving health care quality, congratulated NMMRA for this achievement saying, “It is not at all surprising to me that NMMRA, under Dan Jaco's leadership and his well-qualified staff, would score high in the nation. I look forward to our continuing partnership.”

The survey addressed the following general topics related to customer knowledge, perception, and satisfaction:

- Access to the QIO
- Accuracy of responses to questions
- Timeliness of response
- Professionalism and courtesy of the staff
- Technical support, e.g. data collection, data dissemination/feedback, intervention assistance/dissemination, provider education efforts, QIO partnership activities and system changes
- Overall experience with the QIO
- Knowledge/perception about QIO services
- Knowledge/perception about CMS quality initiatives

Overall, the survey measures customers’ interaction and experience working with the QIO.

NMMRA is an Albuquerque-based, non-profit, physician-sponsored organization. Serving as a resource to the state’s health care community and to Medicare beneficiaries, NMMRA seeks to fulfill its mission to facilitate demonstrable and continuous improvement in the quality of health

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care and achieve its vision to be a premier and innovative leader in improving health care. NMMRA has served continuously as the state's only federally contracted Medicare QIO since 1984. NMMRA also serves as the state's Medicaid External Quality Review Organization.

*Christine Beechhold, MA is a communications specialist with NMMRA. She has over 10 years experience working in health care communications and media relations.*

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