April 18, 2016

The Honorable Andy Slavitt
Acting Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Acting Administrator Slavitt:

We are writing to express some concerns with the hospital star rating system that CMS plans to publicly release in April 2016. While we strongly support public reporting of provider quality data, we urge you to ensure that this data adequately accounts for hospital patient mixes that include higher proportions of patients with multiple complex chronic health conditions and lower socioeconomic status. We also request that you provide hospitals with more details on the methodology used to determine their star ratings.

We want to make sure that the star rating system is not misleading to consumers because of flaws in the measures that underpin the ratings. As you know, many prominent hospitals that are in the top echelon of other quality rating reports, and handle the most complex procedures and patients, will receive one or two stars (out of a possible five), indicating that they have the poorest quality in comparison to other hospitals.

We are concerned that the hospital star ratings, in their current form, may be unfairly masking quality or, possibly, over-weighting of patient experience measures and will therefore not help consumers make well-informed decisions about which hospitals to use. A number of the quality measures that underpin the ratings unfairly impact teaching hospitals that treat low socioeconomic status patients, more complex patients, and perform a greater number of complicated surgeries. MedPAC, the National Quality Forum, and other researchers have underscored the importance of appropriately adjusting for socioeconomic status and patient complexity; and CMS has recognized the need for this adjustment in the Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D programs. We also encourage CMS to incorporate the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation’s forthcoming findings on the impact of socioeconomic status on quality measures into future star ratings.

Additionally, we are concerned that CMS has provided insufficient details regarding the methodology used to determine these star ratings and has not provided hospitals with the data used to derive the ratings. We have heard from hospitals in our districts that they do not have the necessary data to replicate or evaluate CMS’s work to ensure that the methodology is accurate or fair. We believe that additional time is necessary for hospitals and stakeholders to thoroughly review the data and understand the impact of the current methodology to ensure the validity and accuracy of the information before it is publicly released. We respectfully request that you delay release of the star ratings to provide the necessary time to more closely examine the star rating methodology, analyze its impact on different types of hospitals, and provide more transparent information regarding the calculation of the ratings to determine accuracy.
We want to work together to ensure that hospitals are not penalized for treating the most vulnerable or complex patients in the star ratings system, the Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program, or any other quality program. We urge CMS to work with Congress and the hospital community to resolve these concerns. Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jim Renacci  
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell  
Member of Congress

Tom Price, M.D.  
Member of Congress

Robert Brady  
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Tammy Duckworth  
Member of Congress

Jeff Duncan  
Member of Congress

Brad Ashford  
Member of Congress

Ryan Zinke  
Member of Congress

Justin Amash  
Member of Congress

Lou Barletta  
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress
Tom Rice
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David Scott
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Dan Kildee
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Curt Clawson
Member of Congress

Gregg Harper
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Mark Pocan
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Brian Babin
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Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Richard Hanna
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Candice Miller
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Mike Rogers
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John Ratcliffe
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Frank C. Guinta
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Bob Gibbs
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Dave Brat  
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Steven Palazzo  
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Peter King  
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Phil Roe  
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Ken Buck  
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Ralph Abraham, M.D.  
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Bruce Poliquin  
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Denny Heck  
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Ryan Costello  
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Mike Bishop  
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Richard Hudson  
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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
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Earl L. "Buddy" Carter  
Member of Congress

Ann Wagner  
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Patrick Meehan  
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Mike Pompeo  
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Jim McGovern  
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Tom Emmer  
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Tom MacArthur  
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George Holding  
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Todd Young  
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Diane Black  
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Adam Kinzinger
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Brad Wenstrup
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Seth Moulton
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Tim Ryan
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Randy Neugebauer
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Trent Kelly
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Joe Crowley  
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Susan W. Brooks  
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Kathleen Rice  
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Jody Hice  
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Lee Zeldin  
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Mike Kelly  
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Derek Kilmer  
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Lynn Jenkins  
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Marsha Blackburn  
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Charles B. Rangel  
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Michael Fitzpatrick
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Chris Smith
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Sanford Bishop Jr.
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Harold Rogers
Member of Congress

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

Dutch Ruppersberger
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Austin Scott
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Mick Mulvaney
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Kristi Noem
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