

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Carol Ann Campbell
PHONE: 973-315-0300 or 973-567-1901
E-MAIL: carolann@campbellhealthmedia.com

**Data Profile of Pleasantville, Absecon and Smithville Details
Rates of Depression, Related Health Conditions in Sandy-hit Area**

**Federal Project to Improve Behavioral Health Services for Medicare Recipients Will Help
Prepare for Future Disasters**

EAST BRUNSWICK, NJ — Some older adults and disabled residents in the Pleasantville, Absecon and Smithville community may be at increased risk of deteriorating health, depression, anxiety/adjustment disorders, and isolation as a result of Superstorm Sandy. A new behavioral health profile, developed by Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. (HQSI), the federally designated healthcare quality improvement organization for New Jersey, provides data that can help determine the storm's impact on key depression risk factors.

The Pleasantville, Absecon and Smithville community profile is one of 10 community and 10 county profiles developed as part of an ambitious Medicare-funded project, *Enhancing Coordination of Behavioral Health Services after Superstorm Sandy: Planning for Future Disasters*. The profiles focus on areas hardest hit by the storm.

The project aims to help local communities understand how the storm affected the behavioral health of older adults and the disabled, as well as plan for future disasters. Another goal is to encourage greater use of depression screening, a covered service for Medicare beneficiaries that can help identify those with deteriorating health related to depression.

HQSI used Medicare claims and other data to analyze rates of depression and related disorders, and the use of behavioral health services, among Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries living in selected communities during the 21-month period prior to October 2012. For example, the data shows that in Pleasantville, Absecon/Smithville during this period:

- 25.7 percent of Medicare beneficiaries experienced depression or related disorders, such as anxiety or adjustment disorders.
- Pleasantville and Absecon/Smithville community beneficiaries had a higher rate of Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders or senile dementia (4.4%) and amputations (0.2%) than in Atlantic County.
- The Pleasantville and Absecon/Smithville community had a higher rate of adjustment disorder (5.2%) than Atlantic County.
- As in all the selected communities, use of the Medicare depression screening benefit was low, less than a half of one percent of beneficiaries. The Medicare depression screening benefit became available in October 2011.

“Collecting this baseline data is the first step toward understanding how Superstorm Sandy affected the behavioral health of Medicare recipients,” said HQSI Quality Improvement Specialist Janet Knoth, BS, RN, CHPN. HQSI plans to update the profile with post-Superstorm Sandy data in early spring to determine the impact of the storm on behavioral health issues and services.

HQSI is reaching out to community leaders and mayors in the community to discuss how this data can help increase the rate of depression screening and support a community-based approach to behavioral health services after a disaster.

“Older adults are especially vulnerable to physical and behavioral health issues after a disaster and, unlike other conditions, behavioral health issues are often under-diagnosed,” said Ms. Knoth. “Unfortunately, in our society, the stigma associated with behavioral or mental health may prevent people from seeking care. Since depression can also affect physical health, screening is an important health tool. That’s why we want to spread the word that depression screening is a covered Medicare benefit.”

The community profiles, and the county profiles HQSI developed for the New Jersey counties declared federal disaster areas after Superstorm Sandy, are available at www.hqsi.org.

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About HQSI

Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. partners with healthcare providers, organizations, communities, and consumers to make healthcare safer, more efficient, and more effective. Working under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HQSI is the nonprofit federally

designated quality improvement organization (QIO) for New Jersey. Its methods include assessing opportunities for improvement, sharing best practices, and designing strategies with measurable and sustainable results. The goal is for consumers to receive high-quality, patient-centered care with the best possible outcomes. Learn more about HQSI at www.hqsi.org.