

## **New process 'first step' in reducing psychiatric hospitals' administrative burden**

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The U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services this month said a streamlined survey and certification process for psychiatric hospitals will take effect in March.

Industry leaders said cutting surveying in half should help alleviate hospitals' administration burden, which takes time away from patient care. They also said they hope it signals more actions to come.

With the new survey process, psychiatric hospitals will receive one survey each year—rather than two—to review compliance with both general and psychiatric hospital requirements.

"It never made sense why two agencies would come in and survey the same things," said Carolyn Sweetapple, executive director of Northwell's two psychiatric hospitals: Zucker Hillside in Glen Oaks, Queens, and South Oaks in Amityville on Long Island. "It always felt redundant and fragmented, and it added administrative burden."

Sweetapple applauded CMS for taking the step to reduce inefficiency.

Shawn Coughlin, president and CEO of the National Association for Behavioral Healthcare, said the change is an inaugural effort—just the tip of the iceberg.

"Is it helpful to do only one survey? Yes," he said. "Does it change what's hidden under the water's surface? No."

So-called B-tag requirements, which are a condition of participation in Medicare and Medicaid, were developed and interpreted decades ago, when lengths of stay at psychiatric hospitals were largely weeks or months, rather than days, Coughlin said. He pointed to B-tags as "one of the most egregious examples of paperwork" problems.

An NABH report last year found that B-tags result in about \$622 million in compliance costs each year. Many in the industry want to eliminate the documentation-heavy, outdated tags, the report found.

Neither Sweetapple nor Coughlin expressed concern that streamlining the survey process for psychiatric hospitals would negatively affect care. Rather, they said, it's expected to free up weeks of providers' time and result in more attention to patients.

CMS said in a statement provided to *Crain's* that the agency expects the new process to better identify noncompliance because a single survey team ensures more comprehensive hospital reviews.

"They are able to better identify inconsistencies, trends and discrepancies," the spokesperson said, "which can be connected to provide a more comprehensive overview of underlying systemic issues."