



October 29, 2008

Dear Hospital Colleague:

I am very pleased to inform you that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a memorandum on October 24 that clarifies the use of standing orders in hospitals. This clarification was sought by The Joint Commission and brings CMS' interpretation of standing orders into alignment with The Joint Commission's view on how to facilitate the timely treatment of certain patients, particularly those who need medications, not previously ordered, to be administered within brief timeframes. The Joint Commission identified the issue through concerns raised by the field and brought it to the attention of CMS. The Joint Commission has been working with CMS on this issue for some time, advocating on behalf of Joint Commission accredited hospitals. Subsequently, other organizations and hospitals voiced support for this CMS change.

The new memorandum clarifies an earlier CMS memo issued in February 2008, and removes a requirement to obtain patient-specific practitioner approval for standing orders that meet the CMS' criteria prior to treatment. With this new memo, timely treatment can be provided to patients and the order can be signed by the physician at a later time. The Joint Commission believes this approach provides the safest, most expeditious way to provide timely care and treatment to patients. CMS' previous interpretation of its Conditions of Participation on this issue raised serious questions about whether common safety practices in the care of newborns, patients with asthma and other acute conditions, and deteriorating patients would be permitted to continue.

The clarification in the Survey and Certification Group memo states: *The use of standing orders must be documented as an order in the patient's medical record and signed by the practitioner responsible for the care of the patient, but the timing of such documentation should not be a barrier to effective emergency response, timely and necessary care, or other patient safety advances.*

In the memo, CMS notes its intention to work with the professional community to develop an understanding of best practices and definitions for standing orders, pre-printed order sets, and effective methods to promote evidence-based medicine. The Joint Commission will continue to work with CMS and other stakeholders on these issues.

The CMS memorandum can be found at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/PMSR/list.asp#TopOfPage> . Please direct any questions to The Joint Commission's Standards Interpretation Group at (630) 792-5900 or via the online submission form at <http://www.jointcommission.org/Standards/OnlineQuestionForm/>.

Sincerely yours,

Mark R. Chassin, M.D., M.P.P, M.P.H.
President