



Center for Clinical Standards and Quality/Survey & Certification Group

Ref: S&C: 13-49-ESRD

DATE: July 26, 2013

TO: State Survey Agency Directors

FROM: Director
Survey and Certification Group

SUBJECT: Surveyor Technical Assistant for Renal Disease (STAR) automated End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) survey program upgrade release to coordinate with the ESRD Core Survey process roll-out

Memorandum Summary

This memorandum is intended to provide guidance related to the following:

- **STAR 3.6 (STAR “Lite”) release** scheduled to occur with the ASPEN 10.1.5 upgrade.
- **State Survey Agency actions** to ensure an efficient transition to STAR 3.6 for current surveyor STAR users.

Purpose:

We are announcing the release of the updated version of the automated End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Survey tool, STAR 3.6, which conforms with the new ESRD Core Survey Process (STAR “Lite”). We also want to inform State Survey Agencies of actions that must be taken to assure surveyors who currently use STAR to conduct ESRD surveys may continue without interruption.

Background:

Surveyor Technical Assistant for Renal Disease (STAR) is a software application created to automate the survey and certification process for ESRD facilities. STAR provides surveyors with specific survey probes, questions and guidance to facilitate and direct a standardized survey of dialysis facilities. STAR has been used by specifically-trained surveyors to conduct ESRD surveys in most States for several years, with several revisions to portions of the content and function during that time. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) strongly encourage all State Agencies to have their ESRD surveyors attend the CMS STAR training course and to conduct ESRD surveys using STAR.

In 2012, the ESRD Survey process was significantly revised as part of the CMS Survey & Certification Quality Assurance Efficiency & Effectiveness (QAEE) Initiative, resulting in the development of the new ESRD Core Survey process. The new ESRD Core Survey process is being rolled-out nationally in fiscal years 2013 and 2014, after which all ESRD surveys will be conducted using the Core Survey process. Starting in December, 2012 and going forward, all ESRD Surveyor training courses will be based on the ESRD Core Survey process. Previously-trained ESRD surveyors are expected to attend a Core Survey course during the national roll-out to effectively transition to the Core Survey process.

To align with the comprehensive changes of new ESRD Core Survey process, STAR is being revised in two stages: STAR "Lite" and STAR "Brite." Currently, STAR has undergone a major content revision along with reorganization and streamlining of most of the survey tasks within the STAR program for the STAR Lite stage, and will be released as STAR 3.6. STAR 3.6 will be released simultaneously with the ASPEN 10.1.5 upgrade on July 28, 2013. The ASPEN and ASE-Q upgrade to 10.1.5 includes the database integration of STAR data into the ASE-Q Sybase database, therefore STAR 3.6 will only function with ASE-Q 10.1.5 and not with earlier versions. STAR 3.6 will be available on the STAR collaboration web site at: www.alpinetg.com/star when released.

State Survey Agencies should be aware of the necessary actions to prevent interruption in STAR use for conducting ESRD surveys, as well as educational opportunities for current and new STAR users to facilitate transition to the major revisions in STAR 3.6 from previous versions.

Surveyor Training

Surveyor training for STAR 3.6 will be offered for both experienced STAR users and for ESRD-trained surveyors who are new to STAR. Experienced STAR users may attend a webinar introducing the changes in STAR 3.6. The STAR 3.6 webinar is expected to be presented in August, 2013, with the date and time to be announced through the Training Division. The STAR 3.6 webinar will be archived in the CMS system for future access to surveyors who cannot attend the live presentation. Experienced ESRD STAR users who have attended an in-person STAR training course may use STAR 3.6.

As always, for new STAR users, in-person STAR training courses will be offered periodically throughout the fiscal year, and will be based on the current version of STAR at the time of the course, currently STAR 3.6. Attendees at in-person STAR training courses must have attended an ESRD Core Survey training course as a prerequisite.

Technical Considerations

The database integration of STAR data into the ASE-Q Sybase database modifies STAR to store STAR survey data, both in the original format and in a new relational format, in ASE-Q. This new survey data will also be uploaded from ASE-Q into the State databases during transfer operations, preserving the STAR survey data at the state level. All surveyors should transfer their ASE-Q survey back to the state level (ACO) for STAR surveys, rather than writing directly to ACO, to preserve the STAR data.

STAR 3.6 will only work with ASE-Q 10.1.5, not earlier versions of ASE-Q. Therefore, upgrades of the software should be done together. STAR 3.6 will load survey data to STAR from the ASE-Q database and answer files will no longer be stored on the hard drive in the STAR\Surveys directory. This release will not, however, remove older surveys from this directory. All team members of a survey must be using the same STAR version.

Please note that new relational data may trigger many comparison screens when transferring a STAR survey in ASPEN. The steps below should be taken to minimize these compare screens:

- Create survey shells in ACO and export to ASE-Q.
- Enter all findings and complaint documentation in STAR/ASE-Q.
- Synchronize data only in STAR, don't transfer your shell between team members in ASE-Q mid-survey.
 - Merge in ASE-Q, if desired, only once after survey completion.
- Survey entries should imported into ASE-Q and exported to ACO.
- Wait until all surveyor entries have been exported into ACO before final edits.

Questions about this memorandum may be addressed to Judith Kari at Judith.Kari@cms.hhs.gov or the STAR Help Desk at 800-659-4626.

Effective Date: This policy should be communicated with all survey and certification staff, their managers and the State/Regional Office training coordinators within 30 days of this memorandum.

/s/

Thomas E. Hamilton

cc: Survey and Certification Regional Office Management