

## Hospital Data to Be Disclosed In an Effort to Analyze Costs

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In a reversal of longstanding policy, the Social Security Administration has decided to make public detailed financial and statistical records filed annually by the 14,000 hospitals and nursing homes that participate in the Medicare program.

A spokesman for the Bureau of Health Insurance, the component of the Federal agency that administers the Medicare program, said the action was taken in response to numerous consumer requests for data under the Freedom of Information Act of 1969. Institutions participating in the Medicare program are required to file detailed reports each year to Social Security on statistical and financial matters.

Manuel Levine, the spokesman, said its records would be opened to the public beginning Wednesday, unless hospital interests obtained an injunction before that.

Donald Rubin, director of the New York-based Consumer Commission on the Accreditation of Health Services, one of several groups that requested the confidential data, said consumers would now be in a position to scrutinize hospital records "to determine where the money comes from and how it is spent, and possible areas of waste and duplication."

### Fuel for Testimony

Mr. Rubin also said consumers would be privy, for the first time, to statistical data on operations that would put them in a better position to testify before accreditation hearings for hospitals, which are held every two years.

Academicians and private researchers, he added, would be able to examine data on the types and frequencies as well as the effectiveness of treatment programs.

Mr. Levine said that the statistical and financial reports it requires Medicare institutions to file each year had previously been kept private "because the institutions felt that public disclosure would allow their competition to gain an unfair advantage."

"But it is our feeling that under the Freedom of Information Act, all but the private personal records of patients should be subject to public examination," Mr. Levine said.

The American Hospital Association, which represents more than 6,000 of the nation's 7,000 hospitals, said in a telegram to the Social Security Administration that it generally supported the change in regulations but was concerned about possible misuse of the data.

John Alexander McMahon, the president, said in the telegram:

"We request therefore that you delay implementing the process until alternatives have been considered to insure procedural safeguards to protect against inappropriate use [of the data]."

A spokesman said the association would also request discussions between hospital and Social Security Administration officials before implementing the new policies.