

3.2 Becoming Familiar with the MDS-recommended Approach

1. First, reading the Manual is essential.

- The CMS Long-Term Care Facility Resident Assessment Instrument User's Manual is the primary source of information for completing an MDS assessment.
- Notice how the manual is organized.
- Using it correctly will increase the accuracy of your assessments.
- While it is important to understand and apply the information in Chapter 3, facilities should also become familiar with Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6. These Chapters provide the framework and supporting information for data collected on the item set as well as the process for further assessment and care planning, submitting and modifying assessments, and information on the SNF PPS payment system.
- It is important to understand the entire process of the RAI in conjunction with the intent and rationale for coding items on the MDS 3.0 item set.
- Check the MDS 3.0 Web site regularly for updates at:
<https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality/nursing-home-improvement/resident-assessment-instrument-manual>.
- If you require further assistance, submit your question to your State RAI Coordinator listed in Appendix B: State Agency and CMS Locations RAI/MDS Contacts available in the Downloads section on CMS' website:
<https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality/nursing-home-improvement/resident-assessment-instrument-manual>.

2. Second, review the MDS item sets.

- Notice how sections are organized and where information should be recorded.
- Work through one section at a time.
- Examine item definitions and response categories as provided on the item sets, realizing that more detailed definitions and coding information is found in each Section of Chapter 3.
- There are several item sets, and depending on which item set you are completing, the skip patterns and items active for each item set may be different.

3. Complete a thorough review of Chapter 3.

- Review procedural instructions, time frames, and general coding conventions.
- Become familiar with the intent of each item, rationale and steps for assessment.
- Become familiar with the item itself with its coding choices and response options, keeping in mind the clarifications, issues of note, and other pertinent information needed to understand how to code the item.
- Do the definitions and instructions differ from current practice at your facility?
- Do your facility processes require updating to comply with MDS requirements?

- Complete a test MDS assessment for a resident at your facility. Enter the appropriate codes on the MDS.
- Make a note where your review could benefit from additional information, training, and using the varying skill sets of the interdisciplinary team. Be certain to explore resources available to you.
- As you are completing this test case, read through the instructions that apply to each section as you are completing the MDS. Work through the Manual and item set one section at a time until you are comfortable coding items. Make sure you understand this information before going on to another section.
- Review the test case you completed. Would you still code it the same way? Are you surprised by any definitions, instructions, or case examples? For example, do you understand how to code Functional Abilities?
- As you review the coding choices in your test case against the manual, make notations corresponding to the section(s) of this Manual where you need further clarification, or where questions arose. Note sections of the manual that help to clarify these coding and procedural questions.
- Would you now complete your initial case differently?
- It will take time to go through all this material. Do it slowly and carefully without rushing. Discuss any clarifications, questions or issues with your State RAI Coordinator (see **Appendix B: State Agency and CMS Locations RAI/MDS Contacts** available in the Downloads section on CMS' website: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality/nursing-home-improvement/resident-assessment-instrument-manual>).

4. Use of information in this chapter:

- Keep this chapter with you during the assessment process.
- Where clarification is needed, review the intent, rationale and specific coding instructions for each item in question.