



Own it. Be real. And keep it simple: Six tips for effectively communicating about nursing home quality and safety

Stephen L. Davidow, MBA-HCM, LSSBB, CPHQ, APR

President Biden in his 2022 State of the Union Address and more recent communications from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) clearly state that nursing home quality and transparency are front and center.

During the pandemic, news accounts showed that many nursing home residents' experiences varied greatly from the CMS Star-rating their nursing homes received and they and their families relied upon to find a safe, quality home.

CMS's announcement signals a new opportunity for nursing homes to engage with internal and external stakeholders on the topic of quality in ways they have not done previously, and, look for opportunities to make improvements in the care they provide.

To create a culture of quality during a time of transparency, I recommend six tips as a path forward in a competitive environment that includes fines, potential expulsion from the Medicare program and negative publicity for medical errors, preventable readmissions and facility-acquired infections. Providing quality care and effectively communicating about it is now a business imperative.

- 1. Know your data (and that of others)** – There are a number of public databases with credible data ([CMS Hospital Compare](#), The Joint Commission’s [www.QualityCheck.org](#), [WhyNotTheBest.org](#), [U.S. News and World Report](#), [LeapFrogGroup.org](#)). Senior leaders and communications staffs are often surprised when pieces of their quality data are examined, especially by advocacy groups and unions. If they know your quality performance ratings, you should too.
- 2. Embrace your ratings and rankings** – Do not attack, be defensive or dismissive of the ratings and your performance in the ratings. Acknowledge your organization’s strengths AND weaknesses; while using the opportunity to talk about your improvement efforts and your commitment to quality. Talk about specific initiatives you are leading or involved in to improve performance. Share gains you have made after systematic efforts to address challenging areas. People respond well to openness and honesty.
- 3. Keep communications simple and accurate** – Health care terminology is complex so look for ways to communicate in ways that the average person will understand. Health care consumers are increasingly savvy and by talking in clear language, you show your desire to engage with them authentically.
- 4. Develop a dashboard** – Health care organizations often keep track of their performance on key outcomes measures for internal monitoring. Consider placing a widget on your home page with key data of interest to your stakeholders.
- 5. Keep your data up to date** – One of the complaints about much of the publicly reported data is that it is old. You can report data on your own site as frequently as you like, therefore demonstrating your interest in being transparent and accountable.

- 6. Keep it human** – It is easy to forget that quality data is about how well health care providers and professionals take care of PEOPLE – spouses and partners, parents, children, grandparents, friends, etc. Explore ways to reflect the special nature of the business in ways that are consistent with your culture and your brand. Health care is a caring business, so show that you care.

Communicating effectively about quality will align your organization’s quality initiatives and outcomes with strategic business objectives. Never before has quality had the potential to have such an impact not only on the balance sheet but your reputation and the lives of those you serve. You are in a unique role to help your organization prepare for this time of greater transparency and accountability.

Contact:

stephen@davidowquality.com

708-284-2300