



## **Helping nursing homes communicate and address the quality challenge in a time of transparency and accountability**

Revelations about poor nursing home care quality in the U.S., specifically high rates of Covid-19 infection and death, in the early months of the pandemic illustrated the need for stronger safeguards for America's elderly and most vulnerable patients. Additionally, a detailed analysis of Medicare data showed a significant disparity between the published results of the federal government's Star rating system for nursing homes and the reality that residents and their family members experienced. Many nursing homes received 5-star ratings based on self-reported data that was inaccurate, or in some cases untruthful.

In President Biden's State of the Union address earlier this year, he announced a new initiative spearheaded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), to focus on improving quality in nursing homes, as well as penalize nursing homes that deliver substandard care.

Although there is a long history of an organized quality improvement and patient safety effort in America's hospitals, there is no similar effort for nursing homes.

### **What should nursing homes do?**

Learning from decades of healthcare quality improvement lessons in hospitals and health systems, nursing homes must understand that changing this dynamic starts with the culture. Quality starts at the top with leadership and management commitment. There is no way to provide quality care without a commitment to quality. A culture of quality also understands that improvement can only be made by the people who do the work. This is the foundation for all improvement work. By creating a culture focused on quality, nursing home leaders and management can address three critical challenges today that directly affect quality and the nursing home field's reputation:

- Staff engagement and satisfaction
- Performance on externally reported quality measures
- Reimbursement based on quality-of-care performance

At this critical time, many nursing homes suffer high levels of staff turnover. Many nursing home staff are not trained at the same professional level as many



of their counterparts are in the acute care setting. Given that most nursing home staff do not have extensive clinical training and receive low pay, more similar to the fast-food industry, there is little incentive for employees to stay. Nursing homes are 24/7 operations and it is demanding work. Staff are not encouraged to help solve problems that affect nursing home quality and do not see paths to greater personal and professional satisfaction.

However, nursing homes and their residents and patients are affected by many serious medical conditions – some of which occur but never should:

- Falls
- Blood clots
- Skin lesions and ulcers
- Staff injuries from improper lifting
- Poor staff and resident satisfaction
- Legal and regulatory action, such as suits and fines or sanctions

### **How can your nursing home get started on its quality journey?**

1. Develop a culture of quality improvement that defines what quality is and engages staff in the work, making them active problem solvers.
2. Be transparent in all communications about the organization's quality with both internal and external stakeholders.
3. Use recognized quality improvement methods and tools – make improvement happen and stick.
4. Celebrate and communicate successes with all stakeholders.
5. Provide orientation and training to all new staff, which clearly communicates the organization's commitment to quality and staff members' responsibility in delivering on the promise.

### **How does HQA work?**

HQA provides a two-pronged approach. The first is a training program that explains what quality improvement is and isn't, as well as practical and instantly implementable and understandable tools. And second a communications tool box that any institution may use to launch and support its quality improvement initiatives internally to increase staff interest, commitment and satisfaction in becoming problem solvers and improvement professionals.

## **Quality Improvement Training Program**

The training program includes: Introductory video for board, senior leadership and staff; and 10, one-hour recorded modules that breakdown the quality improvement methodology and tools in bite sizes that allow teams to get moving right away.

### On-line training modules

1. Creating a culture of quality improvement
2. Building effective teams for quality improvement
3. Where to Start: Prioritizing and scoping quality improvement projects
4. Value-Stream Mapping: Finding Gaps and Opportunities for Improvement
5. Root-cause analysis: Digging deep to improve
6. Identifying waste and value-added activities
7. PDSA - How to get started in quality improvement using Plan, Do, Study, Act.
8. Its broken - now what? Creating and testing improvement ideas
9. How to get the most out of rapid process improvement events
10. Sustaining improvements over time: key challenges and tools

## **Quality Communications Tool Box**

To support a nursing home's commitment to quality improvement and engage key internal and external stakeholders, HQA provides the following:

1. Key communications recommendations, such as:
  - Celebrate quality successes (and suggestions on how to do that)
  - Recognize team members for their efforts that improve quality
  - Highlight successful QI projects and their teams (bulletin boards and staff communications)
  - Provide gift cards that recognize quality improvement successes
2. Customizable pre-designed templates (may insert organizations logo):
  - Articles (staff communications)
  - Email and text copy alerts and information
  - Project communications template (Challenge; Team; What was done; Results)
  - Internal launch signage



- Presentation slides
- Web banners
- Paycheck envelope stuffers
- Computer screen savers
- Staff uniform badges (rectangle)
- Staff uniform buttons (“Ask Me about Quality (and Why It’s Important to You and Me.)”)
- Information sheet on quality and the quality initiative to insert in marketing material about nursing home
- New staff orientation materials

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