

# Long-Term Care Survey Alert

## Staffing Strategies: Invest In A Great MDS Coordinator

**This position can make a crucial difference to your facility's bottom line.**

You need the best possible MDS coordinator to ensure that your facility functions smoothly under all circumstances by capturing all possible reimbursement opportunities while staying compliant. Here's how to retain a fine MDS coordinator once you've acquired one.

**Keep in mind:** An MDS Coordinator is no longer simply a paper-pusher who is in charge of simply complying with federal regulations, according to **Beckie Dow**, vice president of field operations for Topsfield, MA-based **Harmony Healthcare International**, in a Sept. 5 company blog posting. "Today's savvy MDS Coordinator has to remain in compliance, but also recognize opportunities to capture the highest reimbursement opportunities that the facility is entitled to."

### Provide Support & Education

Allow your MDS Coordinator as much support and education as available, advises **Marilyn Mines, RN, BC, RAC-CT**, senior manager of clinical services for **FR&R Healthcare Consulting Inc.** in Deerfield, IL. "Too often, MDS Coordinators are thrown into the position and have to fend for themselves."

**Cost:** "This will result in a short-term, burned-out person who may leave the facility in a lurch," Mines warns.

**What's more:** Investing in training has a dual benefit. "First, it makes the MDS Coordinator feel valued, because you chose to invest valuable facility resources in her training," Dow said. "Second, it keeps the MDS Coordinator fresh, current, and accurate in MDS completion."

### Who's the Boss?

The MDS Coordinator should report to the administrator, not the director of nursing (DON), Mines says. "This is mainly because, as a nurse, the MDS Coordinator often gets sucked into doing many daily routine tasks that could be given to the charge nurse." If the MDS Coordinator reports to the administrator, she may not feel compelled to respond to non-MDS requests from the nursing department.

**Mistake:** "Don't use your MDS Coordinator as the ready-made fill-in for any staffing shortages," Dow agreed. "Remember that the MDS work load continues to accumulate if the MDS Coordinator is working on MDS or performing other duties on the floor. Allow your MDS Coordinator enough uninterrupted quiet time to carefully and thoughtfully complete the MDS assessment."

### Get Everyone Else in Line

"The administrator must be a support on a daily basis to the entire RAI process," Mines states. "Other disciplines need to realize that their role in timely compliance is critical. The administrator is over the entire staff, and therefore is the one who can ensure that the RAI processes are followed."

You could choose to delegate sections of the MDS to other members of your management team, but this may cause lost opportunities for financial reimbursement, Dow cautioned. "Today's MDS Coordinator is able to recognize subtle details in the medical record that may yield a more accurate reimbursement rate for the care that your team has provided."

### Think About Appropriate Compensation

You should ensure that your MDS Coordinator's compensation is equal to her work. And keep in mind that, in terms of compensation, this doesn't always need to be an increase in salary, Dow noted. "Many employees recognize that a pay raise may not be feasible, due to other circumstances in your facility."

**Try this:** Recognition of performing an exceptional job can go a long way in making a staffer happy. Small things like a kind word, a nice parking space, buying lunch, or formal recognition can be nearly as important as a token pay raise, Dow said.

**Bottom line:** "A great MDS Coordinator is a very valuable commodity," Dow stressed. "And an MDS Coordinator who feels recognized for the hard work she does every day will be less likely to pursue other employment opportunities."