

MDS Alert

Avoiding Burnout: Use These Tips to Advocate For Your Own Office

If a shared office affects your work, see if you can bargain your way into a better office situation.

MDS coordinators and nurse assessment coordinators (NACs) shoulder so much responsibility for accurately depicting the care that their facility's residents receive - and ensuring appropriate and fair reimbursement for those efforts. Many MDS coordinators or NACs are responsible for submitting assessments for the majority, if not all, of the skilled residents in a facility. Despite shouldering so much responsibility and ensuring a large chunk of a facility's income, many MDS coordinators or NACs are relegated to shared office space where disruptions are rampant - and potentially costly.

Emphasize the fiscal reality of your role. While anyone who works in an office space may dream of more privacy and more productivity, the nurses responsible for the MDS really need an environment with as few distractions as possible. If you're sharing an office with a bunch of people - even colleagues who have similar or complementary roles - you may be losing out on invaluable concentration, which could mean minor or serious mistakes on your assessment submissions or even your facility losing out on full reimbursement.

Underline the uniqueness and significance of MDS knowledge - especially now. There's a good chance you're the only MDS coordinator at your facility, and your time and expertise are crucial. If a poorly situated work environment is robbing you, in particular, of productivity, everyone is losing. With the Patient-Driven Payment Model (PDPM) on the way to replace the Resource Utilization Group (RUG) IV system, you have an extra heavy burden of new and necessary education on your plate. Skilled and confident MDS coordinators are already hard to come by, and you want to make sure your value is understood - especially with the forthcoming changes you'll need to navigate.

Point out the sensitive nature of the information you handle. Preserving residents' privacy and dignity should be a top priority; visitors or other residents shouldn't be able to overhear you asking for clarification on matters like a particular resident's continence status.

More privacy may mean less risk of legal issues. With the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General continually cracking down on the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) breaches and with other sophisticated identity theft concerns, the medical and personal information that you handle should be as protected as possible, including protecting your physical space.

If a private office isn't an option, negotiate location. If your facility doesn't have the space to provide you with a private office, there are other things you can ask for that may make your job easier. While it may make sense to a supervisor or administrator that an MDS coordinator could share a space with a scheduler or be tucked into a medical records room, you know from experience how hard it is to concentrate with constant interruptions.

You may be especially exasperated if your office is where some of the system equipment is located; if other team members are constantly coming in because the most convenient printer or all of the residents' records are in your office, your productivity is suffering. Ask if the printer can be moved elsewhere or whether you can put up a privacy screen that visually separates your desk from the rest of the space.

You know that filling out the MDS as much accuracy as possible requires the MDS coordinator to collaborate with colleagues. If you have any say in the location of your office (shared or private), it makes sense to ask for a space closer to therapy or where certified nurse assistants (CNAs) spend time, versus off the main dining room where resident activities take place throughout the workday.

Bargain for other helpful tools. If you cannot convince the powers that be that a private office will boost your productivity and help your facility's bottom line, there are other tracks you can try. If you've been shuffling between a

resident's records and your assessment program on one monitor, you might dream about how much faster you would complete an assessment if you could see everything simultaneously. Describe this predicament to your supervisor and explain how an extra monitor will help keep you organized and therefore productive.

Similarly, if you're stuck in an office full of chatty colleagues and feel like you cannot get your work done, utilize what technology you can, whether it's noise-canceling headphones combined with a white noise app, or an office fan. If your facility has rules against headsets, point out to your supervisor how much headphones can help you block out distractions - and that they're easier and cheaper than a private office, though of course you'd take the latter!