

## MDS Alert

### Facility Best Practices: 3 Ways To Help Your Facility's Whole Team Thrive

#### **Making time for training pays off in unexpected ways.**

With the enormity of new regulations now in place, including new survey processes and QAPI requirements, you and team members may feel overwhelmed by the necessity of staying on top of all of the changes. Beware, though, that facilities that adjust their protocols as soon as possible, in order to adapt fully to the new requirements will almost definitely come out on top.

**Renee Kinder**, a licensed speech pathologist, resident assessment coordinator, and director of clinical education at **Encore Rehabilitation** in Louisville, Kentucky, suggests that making sure your facility's staff can all communicate effectively to one another and to patients may be the key to making sure your facility thrives.

**1. Train your whole team.** Consistent education of all of your employees - CNAs, SLPs, OTs, and PTs - is the best way to improve patient outcomes and even improve job satisfaction within employees.

Consistent training is especially important in long-term care, where the nurses work in-house and the therapy team is typically contracted. Patients see multiple staff members throughout the day, but each staff member encounters the patient for only short periods of time. Because of this reality, care plans can become disjointed or accidentally ignored - at the expense of the patients.

The remedy? Education and collaboration. Your whole team needs to be educated on the diseases that your patients have so that they understand the importance of adhering to the patients' care plans. When your whole staff gets the knowledge base of the conditions facing your patients, they'll begin to view the instructions in patients' care plans as therapy designed to help patients become more independent, rather than procedures that just keep patients alive.

Bright idea: To boost engagement, ask your staffers to train each other on what they see happening with patients. For example, if your physical therapist identifies the best technique to get a patient to walk, she needs to train the rest of your team on that technique.

"When you implement the strategies that therapy has trained you on that makes patients successful, that's when the light bulbs go off," Kinder says. Need more incentive for your staff to collaborate and provide consistent therapy to patients? "It's mutually beneficial for all parties to keep patients independent. The caregiver burden decreases," she adds.

**2. Build in time for team members to do all parts of their jobs.** Providing care is paramount, but, as the saying goes, if you didn't document, it didn't happen. Make sure team members' workloads are distributed in such a way that they have time to take notes as they work. Team members are already dependent on one another to provide comprehensive, high-quality care for all residents. The MDS requirements further bolster the dependency, because so many team members are responsible for documenting the many aspects of care your facility provides. (And surveyors will be relying on MDS and the clinical record more than ever, going forward with the new long-term care survey process.)

While some team members' roles may have quieter moments throughout their shifts when they can steal away to catch up on paperwork, others on the team may be suffering from a busier, less flexible schedule. Your facility can improve your documentation (and maybe even lessen any tension or angst within your team) by consciously building time into employee schedules so they can document care as they provide it.

**Bonus:** Team members are less likely to forget the kind of "mundane" details that make up the bulk of day-to-day care, which means your residents' clinical records and MDS will be more accurate, and therefore your reimbursement may carry more heft, too.

**3. Appreciate maintenance-based care.** Kinder was surrounded by grandparents and great-grandparents while growing up, and she developed a passion for helping geriatric people with chronic conditions like dementia maintain levels of function. This is an often-underappreciated element of rehab therapy, as well as providing long-term care more generally, because it's so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day routine of treating pain and ailments. But providing maintenance-based care has a huge impact on a patients' quality of life. She recommends that providers think critically and use their imaginations to figure out new ways they can treat their geriatric patients.

Take a step back from the daily grind. Find ways to make your care teams work better together. Get educated and start adapting to regulatory changes. Identify how you can make a bigger impact on your residents' lives and truly put each individual at the center of her own care. Doing all of this puts your facility in the best position to improve patient outcomes, capture all of the revenue you deserve, and keep growing.