

OASIS Alert

Case Study TRACK OUTCOME NUMBERS FOR BETTER MARKETING

It takes hard work for a home health agency to attain impressive patient outcomes and even more work to stay on top of all of the outcomes data. But one agency has shown how tracking outcomes numbers can help agencies develop an organized and successful marketing plan.

The Visiting Nurse Association of Southeast Michigan is a non-profit agency that has been serving the Oak Park, MI community for 105 years. With such longevity, you'd think that the agency would be content to rest on its laurels, but not according to VNA's OBQI/nurse program manager Gwendolyn Smith.

For several years, the VNA has been tracking its patient outcomes and infusing this data into marketing efforts, says Smith. Keeping a close watch on outcomes lets the agency gauge overall quality of care trends and hone in on particular practice areas, she explains. "It's up to the agency to investigate internally and make steps toward improvements," she tells Eli. "We are in a data driven environment," Smith adds, and payor sources are "focusing on data from benchmarks to make decisions on reimbursement."

HHAs interested in incorporating their outcomes data into their marketing efforts might want to consider the following tips from the VNA's playbook:

- Know your numbers. An agency that intends to showcase any type of data must first confirm the accuracy and integrity of those numbers, counsels Smith. "You have to be accountable for the data you put out there," she says.

HHAs should make sure their clinical outcomes data are risk-adjusted, and that utilization outcomes are "closely checked in relationship to your submitted files to Medicare," Smith advises. Also, before pasting those sterling outcomes figures into your marketing materials, you should verify that any benchmark study data you use jibes with what Medicare says about your outcomes, she directs.

And don't shy away from any less-than-stellar outcomes data, adds Margaret Adrain, VNA's director of community relations. Knowing your deficiencies and what you're going to do to improve them "says a lot about your organization and what you're all about," she maintains.

- Know who refers to you and what their focus is. As you think about a marketing campaign, find out who your agency's top referral sources are, instructs Smith. Learn who's sending you the most patients and more importantly why. When attempting to woo physicians with outcomes data, zoom in on the specific information that will interest them, recommends Adrain.
- Build your brand name always. When you've been around since 1898, it's easy to take brand name awareness for granted. But agencies new and old must remember that building their brand name is an activity that should never stop, Smith opines.
- Know how satisfied your customers are. No matter how good your outcomes look, you need to know how successful you are at connecting with your patients, Smith urges. Your nurses may be some of the most skilled individuals in their areas of practice, but "if they don't have that interpersonal human relationship," then the data they help generate are "just hard numbers," Smith explains.

Any marketing effort will surely suffer if it isn't supported by the quality of care, Smith says. "Whatever the patients say about you goes back to the physicians and the provider sources, and of course, the negative stuff speaks louder than the positive stuff," she adds.

Given all the current interest surrounding outcomes data, sharing your data now will "show that you're ahead of the



curve," Adrian asserts.

Editor's Note: If you have an OASIS story to share, call Marian Cannell at 800-626-9714.