

## OASIS Alert

### Compliance: PACK SATISFACTION INTO EVERY PATIENT'S EXPERIENCE

Use these cost-saving strategies to improve patient satisfaction while sticking to your budget.

The deadline is ticking down on your first HHCAHPS dry run.

Deadline: Starting in 2012, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** will reduce home health agencies' prospective payment system payments by 2 percent if they don't report patient satisfaction survey data under the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems Home Health Care Survey (HH CAHPS) program.

While that date seems far away, there are several "dry runs" between now and then -- with the first one on July 21. "HHAs must conduct a dry run for at least one of the months in third quarter 2010, and then continuously collect HHCAHPS data every month beginning in October 2010," according to the Home Health Prospective Payment System Final Rule.

The point of this survey is to gauge and reward patient satisfaction, so there's no time like the present to boost your patients' happiness with your care. Use these methods to do your best to make sure everyone's happy:

#### Apply The Advanced Access Model

Most patient complaints come from rigid schedules and seemingly prolonged wait times, notes **Ashraf Fadel**, a consultant with **Sg2 Health Care Solutions** in Skokie, Ill. But you can provide more flexibility and allow patients to feel in control of their care with the "advanced access model."

Think of it like this: With the advanced access model, you're predicting and responding to patient demand rather than trying to control it, Fadel explains.

The goal is to work around patient schedules and give patients more control of their care without sacrificing your agency's operations. You don't have to move to a completely patient-run model to benefit from advanced access. Work these strategies into your policies and procedures:

- Schedule your clinicians' days so that they have room for same-day calls from patients or caregivers who have questions or emergent needs.
- Create a contingency plan for staffing shortages. Your clinicians go on vacation, get sick, and have real-life needs just like everyone else -- often leaving other workers strapped for time. A contingency plan can help hide this weak spot from your patients.
- Reduce the demands on your clinicians by creating alternatives to face-to-face visits when possible. Telephone or email can be extremely helpful for triaging immediate needs and providing quick answers to questions between your scheduled visits.
- Predict patient needs at the time of the visit. Take a few minutes before visiting with your patient to refresh your memory. There may be common needs you can meet or problems you can resolve before your patient has the chance to ask about them.

#### Allow Patients To Review Their Records

Often, patients feel left out of their medical care and can begin to feel that their caregivers aren't listening to them. Avoid this potential misunderstanding by giving patients the option to review their own medical information on a regular

basis, Fadel suggests.

Why? "Patients who have access to their medical records are more likely to participate in their own care, have improved quality outcomes, and are more engaged in self-care strategies," he says. This type of open access turns patients into partners and reinforces their trust and confidence in your care, which is likely to result in higher CAHPS scores.

Try these easy-to-implement options for opening up patient records:

- At the end of each visit or assessment, review your notes and responses with the patient. Allow him or her to ask questions and explain any confusing aspects. You can save time by doing this as you assess the patient, or by asking at the beginning of the assessment if the patient is interested in a detailed overview rather than assuming he or she wants a blow-by-blow.
- Create a web portal that allows patients to view their medical records, request more information, and schedule appointments from a secure site. (This option is available with many electronic medical record systems.)

Be sure to monitor these requests so that you can follow-up with patients who may not understand what they see. "While your patients might not use this, their family members might, Fadel says.

Bottom line: You can take a proactive approach to patient satisfaction without scaring off patients or using up your budget. Try either the advance access method or open record strategy -- or a combination of the two -- to ensure your patients feel appreciated and included after each and every clinician visit.

Resource: Stay updated on HHCAHPS deadlines and breaking news at <http://homehealthcahps.org>.