

## OASIS Alert

### Marketing LET YOUR OUTCOMES CREATE INCOME

If you got it, baby, why not flaunt it? More and more home health agencies are looking to convert their strong patient outcomes into greater business volume by marketing their outcome-based quality improvement data to referral sources.

But this tactic could do more harm than good if your HHA doesn't know what to do  and what not to do  when it comes to marketing your OBQI outcomes.

While it's perfectly acceptable for agencies to use their OBQI outcomes for marketing to referral sources, it's vital for HHAs to know that "they cannot use any patient-identifying information in their marketing activities," stresses Burtonsville, MD-based attorney Elizabeth Hogue.

According to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's privacy standards, there are 18 types of identifiers that an agency must remove from a patient's data to properly de-identify the information. Under HIPAA, the use of any identifiable patient information for marketing activities would require the patient's authorization, she states.

When it comes OBQI data, however, Hogue doesn't expect HHAs will need or use patient-identifying information. Rather, she says, most HHAs will be interested in using aggregate data that compares an agency's outcomes against a national average.

While it's tempting for an agency to just focus on its successful outcomes when crafting a marketing plan, don't ignore any potential weak spots, warns Chicago-based consultant Rebecca Friedman Zuber.

One of the pitfalls of hyping your positive outcomes is that you'll end up sparking interest in all of your outcomes, Zuber opines. Referral sources very easily could request "information for other outcomes which may not be as wonderful as the ones you decided to use to sell yourself," she cautions.

But this scenario might be a welcome wakeup call to HHAs new to the marketing game, Zuber continues. "Once you start talking about outcomes, you have to be able to understand that your referral sources are going to get more sophisticated about the data just like you are," she warns agencies. Not only will they become more data savvy, but "they'll start to ask more questions," Zuber notes.

#### Know Your Data, Story & Audience

The first step to take if you're to market your outcomes is to "know your data better than anybody else," advises Heather Rooney, director of marketing at Outcome Concept Systems, a Seattle-based company that benchmarks OASIS and resource utilization data. Not only must agencies be able to identify and explain the areas in which they are underperforming, but also they must develop and implement corrective plans of action, she states.

After all, mastering your outcomes data for marketing purposes isn't just about knowing numbers and statistics, reminds Rooney. "Know your story  don't just know the data, but know the story of your agency," she counsels. "When looking at the data, all we're really looking at are snapshots in time. You want to make sure that you know what you're doing well in, what you're not doing well in and why." That's the story your agency must be able to convey, she maintains.

Rooney also urges HHAs to keep in mind their intended audiences as they begin to unroll their marketing plans. "You want to know who you need to tell your story to, and that's going to be different depending on who your audience is," she says. Be able to target your communication so as to meet that audience's needs and interests, Rooney stresses. A physician, for example, might be interested in different outcomes or information than a referral service. They may also prefer to see your data presented in different mediums or formats, she adds.



"But the key," Rooney emphasizes, "is that you know your audience, you identify what they care about, and then, of course, you provide them with that information."