

## OASIS Alert

### Outcomes: Beneficiary Focus Group Findings May Surprise You

Find out what really matters to consumers.

Your patients are likely to be pro-home care, no matter what your numbers say - so use your marketing efforts to make them fans of your agency.

Knowing how consumers view home care can help you develop your marketing strategy in response to Home Health Compare.

After several delays, on Nov. 3 the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** expanded its Home Health Compare Web site to include outcomes from all Medicare-certified home health agencies. CMS also ran ads in English and Spanish in newspapers nationwide on Nov. 4. The ads highlighted three of the 11 patient outcomes featured on the Home Health Compare Web site - bathing, ambulation and oral medications.

CMS chose these items because the agency found they matter to consumers. Now Home Health Compare gives you an opportunity to educate the public "about this high quality, cost effective, consumer preferred health care modality," advises **Ann Howard** with the **American Association for Homecare**.

The message you create in your marketing materials should depend on your target audience for the message. To be effective, marketing material must be interesting, relevant and appealing to the audience, says **Heather Rooney** with benchmarking firm **Outcome Concepts Systems Inc.** in Seattle. You should decide what the audience is most interested in and craft your message accordingly, she adds.

#### Use Focus Group Results

Before making the OASIS-based performance measures available to the public, CMS developed and tested plain language versions of 54 OASIS measures. CMS contractor **KPMG Consulting** interviewed 31 people during consumer testing of the proposed outcomes and language to use in the quality initiative, and included the survey participants' responses in an October 2002 report.

In group and individual interviews, beneficiaries and caregivers expressed sentiments that may help you focus your PR efforts where they'll do the most good.

When targeting consumers, consider these findings from the KPMG report:

1. **Consumers didn't completely understand the home care benefit.** Most didn't understand that services such as speech therapy or mental health assessments are available as part of home care, the report notes. Some confused home care with hospice care.
2. **Consumers placed a high value on independence.** Consumers saw as most important those OASIS items closely related to independence, such as ambulation, bathing or taking medications independently. Even when urged to look at the broader indicators of agency quality, such as adverse events, those interviewed focused most on the view of the individual patient. Items such as preventing bedsores, taking meds correctly and being able to eat independently were valued more highly than grooming and housekeeping, the report notes.

3. **Consumers valued more than outcome information.** Consumers understood that factors other than the OASIS-based outcomes were important in choosing an HHA. They wanted to know about staff qualifications, accreditation and history of complaints. Personal qualities of agency staff and continuity of staff from one visit to the next also mattered to many participants.
  
4. **Consumers had a positive attitude toward home care.** They wanted to be able to stay at home and welcomed home health agency assistance in doing so. Those surveyed also generally didn't believe agencies should be held accountable for all the things that went on when HHA staff weren't in the home, especially when caring for patients with chronic, debilitating or terminal illnesses. Consumers were reluctant to attribute outcomes to the agency, generally believing people got better or worse on their own, rather than through actions of the HHA.
  
5. **Consumers rarely selected their home health agency.** As many independent agencies already know, beneficiaries and caregivers were generally unaware that they had a choice of HHAs - even if they'd already had home care experience. Those with previous experience reported little or no involvement in selecting the agency that cared for them, but relied on their doctor or discharge planner to take care of it. This finding reinforces the importance of effectively marketing your agency to these referral sources also.

Editor's Note: Home Health Compare is at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). More HHQI information, including copies of the 69 ads that ran, is at [www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/hhqi/default.asp](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/hhqi/default.asp). KPMG's report is at [www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/hhqi/OASISPhase1.pdf](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/hhqi/OASISPhase1.pdf).