

## OASIS Alert

### Outcomes **MARKETING OUTCOMES: BARK OR BITE?**

Despite the increased clamor over outcomes marketing, not everyone is convinced that referral sources will be bowled over by an agency boasting successful patient outcomes.

"Referral sources don't really know what OBQI is," avers Burtonsville, MD-based attorney Elizabeth Hogue. "It's very foreign to them ... they're going to have a lot of trouble understanding and evaluating what agencies may present to them in terms of OBQI," she contends.

Instead of OBQI data, referral relationships likely will remain driven by the convenience and responsiveness of the home health agency, she says.

Chicago-based consultant Rebecca Friedman Zuber disagrees, however. Referral patterns based on factors like convenience, habit or ownership "will be harder and harder to defend if the referral recipient doesn't have the same level of quality outcomes as other providers do," she says.

Heather Rooney, director of marketing at Seattle-based Outcome Concept Systems, believes that while convenience and responsiveness may remain standby criteria for referral sources, patient outcomes will nonetheless add a very important and influential piece to the overall equation. "We've seen it across the health care industry that using outcomes data is going to lead to success. We've seen it with some of those forward-thinking agencies that have begun to use outcomes data for marketing purposes, and it does lead to an increase in referrals," she declares.

In addition, HHAs cannot ignore the fact that the public release of outcomes data is expected to hit the entire home health industry by the end of this year, note Zuber and Rooney. Whether they like it or not, HHAs will find their data on a series of OASIS indicators posted for all to see.

Those HHAs with very good outcomes on the public comparison should "start a marketing blitz to beat the band," encourages Zuber. Meanwhile, those agencies with unfavorable outcomes had "better be working on them" and had "better have a way to allay the concerns of their referral sources," she adds.

If the previous release of public comparison data for the nursing home industry is any indication for home health, people are definitely going to take notice of this information, reports Rooney. It's therefore vital for HHAs to get a handle on this data, she says. Be able to tell your story, Rooney advises, because if you don't, someone else is going to tell it for you and you may not like what they have to say.