

SUCCESS STORIES

Right tool for the job

A unique quality assurance tool helps this operator find out what residents really want—while also improving compliance and the level of care that's delivered

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Running a long-term care facility can be overwhelming and lonely. But there are heroes out there showing how success can be achieved. Each **SUCCESS STORIES** installment shows how a colleague turned a challenging situation into a victory.

For any quality-focused operator, delivering the best possible care to residents is paramount. But this reality has become even more apparent in recent years, as industry, state and federal initiatives have ratcheted up the stakes.

Perhaps most notably, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' Quality Indicator Survey is prompting many long-term care operators to more closely examine their customer service and quality assurance efforts. Currently, 18 states are implementing the QIS, a two-stage, computer-assisted inspection process that systematically reviews nursing home requirements. The QIS also examines regulatory compliance issues that are triggered during the inspection. What makes the QIS so unique, though, is its focus on resident and family satisfaction. In the past, such input was largely overlooked during surveys.

Proactive planning is important for QIS success, according to CMS spokeswoman Mary Kahn. She says providers can greatly benefit "by working closely with the state agencies



Lorien Health Systems has embraced the abaqis Quality Assurance System as a way to improve care and compliance.

as they roll out QIS, being as up-to-date and informed about the process as possible, and by effectively planning for the change."

Such an approach has paid big dividends for Lorien Health Systems, a six-facility nursing and rehabilitation provider based in Ellicott City, MD. Even before Maryland became a QIS state, Lorien had enhanced its organization-wide quality program by improving communication between staff, residents and family members, and adopting quality assurance tools that would further assist in that goal. In January 2009, the health system adopted the abaqis® Quality Assurance System, a

web-based program marketed and distributed exclusively through Medline Industries, Inc. abaqis is the only quality assessment and reporting system that is tied directly to the QIS. The solution uses the same rates and threshold comparisons as the CMS Data Collection Tool that state surveyors use to conduct the Quality Indicator Survey.

Lorien chose the abaqis program not only because of its ability to prepare employees, residents and their family members for the surveyors' questions. Even more importantly, Lorien wanted to improve the resident care and services provided at each of its facilities,

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according to Wayne Brannock, Lorien's vice president of clinical affairs.

"I wanted to use abaqis even before we were a QIS state, as part of our overall quality program. Of course, when Maryland became a QIS state, we knew abaqis would give us a tremendous advantage in terms of regulatory compliance," he noted.

A layered QA approach

So far, three of Lorien's facilities have undergone their first QIS, and each has experienced significantly fewer deficiencies than the state average – an outcome that Lorien staff largely credits to the abaqis system.

"It is very easy to use and there were no surprises. The system allowed us to not only know and prepare for the questions ahead of time, it also let us proactively monitor and address issues that were identified by residents and family members, so we could inform the surveyors of how we were responding to their needs," said Cheryl Bayne, director of nursing for Lorien Bel Air, a senior rehabilitation community in the Baltimore suburb of Bel Air.

While survey preparedness is an important benefit of the abaqis system, that's just one part of the picture.

"It is not just a survey tool," stressed Brannock. "As part of our overall quality program, we work to use this survey data every month, so we can continue to ask residents what I believe are the five most important words: 'Is this acceptable to you?'" Although Lorien has always prided itself on developing quality programs, Brannock said the information now generated from residents, families and staff, has led to improvements.

Some of the changes are



The abaqis Quality Assurance System helps sensitize staff to resident preferences.

"It's the seemingly small things that often matter most to residents."

Wayne Brannock, Lorien's vice president of clinical affairs

seemingly subtle, but they can have a big impact. A common message gleaned from residents at one Lorien facility, for example, was the desire to add coffee to the list of beverages available between meals. "We had been offering juice and water, but we never realized that we had many coffee drinkers. We started offering coffee and saw our score associated with between-meal beverages jump from 77 percent to 100 percent," said Brannock.

In another facility, the survey revealed that menu adjustments were in order. Several residents in the rehabilitation wing indicated that they would prefer a select menu with more food choices, as opposed to a fixed menu. The change was made and satisfaction scores soared. At Lorien Bel Air, better communication between residents and staff led to some environmental fine-tuning – such as the dimming of lights and a keener focus on noise

reduction – that promoted a calmer, more soothing environment in the evening hours.

"Sometimes, providers just assume that they know what their residents want. But the only way they can really know is by asking the residents. It's the seemingly small things that often matter most to residents," Brannock reasoned. "When you use tools that really drive down to the resident level, you know what is working and what could use some adjusting. When you have this kind of data, you can then identify commonalities so you can make the most appropriate changes to meet residents' needs."

Seeking regular input from residents' family members has also played a role in Lorien's success with abaqis. Often, their suggestions or concerns differ from what is shared by their loved ones, so making them an active part of the communication process can add a unique perspective on resident

care, according to Brannock. If a family member voices a concern, Lorien staff will promptly address the situation, and then layer that discussion with a survey to glean more insight into their needs and expectations. "When you do that, the family really understands and appreciates the kind of care their loved ones are receiving. It demonstrates our commitment to quality and customer service."

Further, regularly involving residents and their family members in the process helps prepare them for the new inspection process. "The QIS process is much different from the previous survey," he added.

Beyond the basics

In the months ahead, Lorien plans to expand its use of abaqis even more. As a survey preparedness tool and as a key component of the health system's overall quality assurance program, Brannock foresees abaqis helping Lorien establish root cause analyses for Stage 2 investigations.

He also envisions its use as a peer review tool for resident observation and other functions. The resident observation tool, he reasoned, could be broken down into several areas, such as nursing, housekeeping and maintenance, to offer a clearer picture of the resident in different care environments – and even different observations from one team or shift to the next.

"The sky really is the limit on how you can use this tool," he said. ■

Coming next month

SUCCESS STORIES will show how one provider improved pressure ulcer care.



“We aced our survey.
There was no guessing what
the surveyors were going to ask -
it was as if we got the questions
before the test.

How?
We use abaqis.”

Agnes Alejandre, RN, BSN
Director of Nursing
Victoria Nursing & Rehab Center
Miami, FL



The new Quality Indicator Survey (QIS) for nursing homes is more resident-centered, with more information obtained from direct questioning of residents and families. In fact, 60 percent of facilities have had more deficiencies in QIS than in the prior traditional survey, often in regulatory areas such as quality of life that were not as fully investigated in the traditional process.

abaqis® is the only quality assessment and reporting system for nursing homes that is tied directly to the QIS, and its quality assessment modules reproduce the same forms, analysis and thresholds used by State Agency surveyors. Rich reporting capabilities on 30 care areas guide you to what surveyors will be targeting in your facility.

That gives you a unique advantage in preparing for your survey – and in meeting your resident's needs.

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