

## SUCCESS STORIES

# Removing stress from the QIS

Operators are feeling more prepared and confident, thanks largely to an innovative quality assurance tool that helps providers address concerns before they become major problems

### 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.



Spokane-based Avalon Care Center at Northpoint is one of many Avalon Healthcare Inc. communities with greater QIS success.

**W**hen the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced plans to implement Quality Indicator Surveys, long-term care providers were rightly concerned. Many questioned whether they were truly ready. In many cases, such worries were justified.

“Planning and preparation is necessary for achieving good survey outcomes,” noted Mary Kahn, a CMS spokesperson. “But it’s about more than just a survey score. It’s really about making sure you’re providing the best care possible to meet the needs of [residents].”

Although the federal regulations and interpretive guidance remain unchanged, the new, two-stage computer-assisted QIS process is far more detailed

than the traditional survey—particularly in its focus on resident and family member satisfaction, and its emphasis on certain regulatory areas. These include quality of life issues that factor in dignity, choices and other quality aspects. While the changes are a positive step for ensuring regulatory compliance and promoting high quality, resident-centric care, an increase in deficiencies is likely if long-term care facilities aren’t adequately prepared for the new process.

### Systematic survey solution

As many facilities that have already undergone the QIS process can attest, the best defense against survey deficiencies is a strong offense. For Salt Lake City, UT-based Avalon

Health Care Inc., a senior healthcare services provider with 38 facilities throughout five states in the Western U.S., the key to QIS success was its system-wide implementation of the abaqis Quality Assurance System.

A web-based tool marketed and distributed exclusively through Medline Industries, Inc., abaqis is the only quality assessment and reporting system tied directly to the QIS. By using the same rates and threshold comparisons used by surveyors, abaqis helps take the guesswork out of the survey process and enables long-term care providers to proactively and promptly address resident and family concerns — long before surveyors ever walk through the door.

**SUCCESS STORIES** is sponsored by Medline Industries, Inc. Learn more at [www.medline.com](http://www.medline.com)



## SUCCESS STORIES

Ahead of its January 2009 implementation of abaqis, Avalon created a quality assurance task force to explore options and determine which solutions would best help their communities meet the more stringent requirements under the QIS. The taskforce determined that the abaqis system would be an essential component to the new quality assurance program, noted Nani Gray, Vice President of Clinical Services for Avalon Health Care Inc.

"The program's assistance with the QIS process was critical to our preparation and success," she said.

Because of abaqis' ease of use, Avalon staff has been able to quickly familiarize itself with the program's many offerings and functional capabilities. The organization has become so adept in its use of abaqis, in fact, that Avalon's staff members have essentially become QIS leaders in their respective communities. Beyond that, seasoned surveyors have reached out to Avalon administrators to ask questions and seek counsel, according to Gray.

"With abaqis, we have found that we are much better prepared for both QIS and traditional surveys. As a company, we have experienced a decrease of F-tags on annual surveys by 7% from the previous year." Two of the five states in which Avalon operates are currently conducting QIS surveys and a third will adopt QIS in 2011. In California alone, citations were down 33%.

To facilitate the interviewing process and ensure effective, consistent data capture, Avalon has taken an entirely electronic approach. Each Avalon facility is outfitted with laptop computers on mobile carts, along with a wireless connection that



By using the same rates and threshold comparisons used by surveyors, abaqis helps take the guesswork out of the survey process.

### "I would not want to operate a facility in today's climate without abaqis."

*Nani Gray, Avalon Health Care's Vice President of Clinical Services*

allows staff to interview residents directly at the bedside. "By asking the questions in the interviews, staff is more attuned to [specific aspects of care and customer service]," Gray continued. "The residents are also used to being interviewed by staff, so when the interviews are conducted by surveyors, it is not a new [experience]."

#### Tracking progress

Avalon has also benefited significantly from abaqis' ability to assist with organization-wide continuous quality improvement initiatives. The company, which rolled out abaqis as a core component of its comprehensive quality assurance program, relies on abaqis to provide clinical services staff with trending reports that include risk assessments for Stage II triggers. This

function allows staff to proactively identify areas in need of improvement.

"The reports give us a targeted trend as to the source of problems," noted Gray. Improvements in these triggered areas can then be measured from one quarter to the next.

Avalon's regional team coordinates an annual peer review at each facility in which a Stage II process is run. This peer review then leads to a score that becomes part of the facility's balanced scorecard. "The results are used to benchmark facilities and help the company identify areas of needed improvement. The annual validation review results in facility-specific action plans to address identified areas," Gray explained.

To further maximize the benefits of the abaqis system,

Avalon encourages each of its facilities to utilize the entire process – including Stage II – at least annually. Certified nursing assistants and other frontline healthcare professionals are also becoming more directly involved in the process, and Avalon is stepping up its educational efforts, as well, which will further serve to improve resident care and facility-wide quality improvement across all of its facilities.

As Gray pointed out, abaqis has been extremely easy to implement and has given Avalon the necessary tools to master the survey process, pinpoint potential areas of improvement and even conduct targeted investigations. Equally important, the abaqis system has given the organization confidence and assurance in knowing that it is proactively capturing data that will help its many facilities provide the very best care possible.

"I would not want to operate a facility in today's climate without abaqis," Gray added. ■

“How do we improve  
our resident and family-  
centered quality of care  
and prepare for QIS?”

We use abaqis.”

**Sherri Dahle, RN, DNS**

*Director of Nursing  
Central Healthcare  
LeCenter, MN*



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.

**abaqis**® is sold exclusively through Medline.  
Learn more by signing up for a free webinar  
demo at [www.medline.com/abaqisdemo](http://www.medline.com/abaqisdemo).

