

Hospital Surveyors Get Necessary Reports to Feds Faster



(Left to right) Susie Klapp, health facilities complaint triage nurse, Donya Lowrie, Bureau of Hospital Standards chief, Sarah Burch, health program representative, Brandy March, health program representative, and Kathie Thomas, Bureau of Hospital Standards assistant chief, participate in a “Tuesday Huddle,” a teleconference about the status of hospitals’ deficiency statements.

Problem

Federal regulations mandate that hospital surveyors submit a statement of deficiencies to a hospital 10 days after a survey ends. Two years ago surveyors in the Bureau of Hospital Standards missed that 10-day deadline and submitted those statements in 14 days, on average. Though the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) invoked no fine or penalty, it did issue a performance measures report. The bureau’s performance measures needed to improve.

Plan

Bureau of Hospital Standards Chief Donya Lowrie sprang into action, eager to improve that record. She realized a major challenge right away. Every one of her 15 surveyors, all telecommuters who were scattered throughout the state, took turns serving as team leader during on-site hospital surveys. There was no **consistent** team leader to handle work flow, workload or overall glitches at a hospital during a survey or serve as a contact person for hospital administrative staff.

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Another issue emerged. The bureau often failed to meet the 10-day time frame to submit a statement of deficiencies because surveyors had little or no time to write the statement after a survey. They were called upon to survey additional hospitals before the paperwork from previous surveys had been completed.

Recall that surveyors inspect hospitals to determine if certain standards of care are met. They may cite a hospital for deficiencies if the hospital is found to provide substandard care or is not in compliance with state or federal regulations.

Do

Step 1

Lowrie and Kathie Thomas, the bureau's assistant chief, put out an alert to their 15 surveyors. They needed five permanent leaders to manage the bureau's five, two-to-three member surveyor teams. Each leader needed to be experienced, able to remain calm in a crisis, and have good data and documentation skills. Each would receive a small raise while serving as a team leader.

Step 2

After Lowrie and Thomas identified the team leaders, they created permanent surveyor teams. A permanent team has consistent members and the assurance that if members are on a survey one week, the bureau will work hard not to have them do another survey the following week. Whenever possible, a team is allowed to return to home base to write a statement of deficiencies before having to go right back in the field to survey.

Permanent surveyor teams have another advantage. Team members get to know each other, to learn each other's strengths and weaknesses, and to bond.

"A team member might be having a bad day because his or her dog died," says Lowrie. "That surveyor is more likely to open up about the dog to team members he or she knows. Those members will more likely give that surveyor a break and pick up the slack if they're on a survey together and know the surveyor's personal situation."

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Surveyors inspect hospitals to determine if certain standards of care are met.

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Check

Though Lowrie doesn't "know a lot about football," she came up with the idea of "Monday Morning Instant Replay" and "Tuesday Huddles" to foster better communication and coordination in the Bureau of Hospital Standards.

Monday Morning Instant Replay, an approximate 20-minute teleconference that begins at 8:15 a.m. every Monday, is for team leaders. They discuss potential growth areas for team members, what went wrong or well with their last survey and unusual cases. For instance, one team leader encountered a wrong-site surgery and a hanging in a hospital and gave advice to the other leaders should they encounter similar situations. Before Monday Morning Instant Replay, teams did not know about or discuss other teams' cases on a routine basis.

Tuesday Huddles, another teleconference, occurs every Tuesday. Six bureau staff members participate—Lowrie, Thomas, the license coordinator, the scheduler, the complaint intake coordinator and the quality reviewer. They discuss the status of deficiency statements, due dates for hospitals' plans of correction, new issues and outstanding CMS items. The process allows everyone to be informed on outstanding items and ensures those items are less likely to be missed.

Act

The impact of the bureau's quality improvement changes is significant. Today a statement of deficiencies is submitted to hospitals about seven days after a survey ends. That's three days **before** the federally mandated 10-day deadline. What's more, the bureau's field staff turnover rate has dropped to zero in the last two years.

"Staff is more content since we put these processes in place," Thomas said. "We now have improved outcomes, morale and good leadership."



The Bureau of Hospital Standards uses football concepts like "Monday Morning Instant Replay" to foster better communication and coordination among employees.