



Partners Home Care

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*"We didn't have to wait five months to see how we were doing,
which we found critical to improvement."*

Judith Flynn

Summary of Project

Partners Home Care has a great deal of pride in the quality of care that they provide. Unfortunately, when data was first published on Medicare's Home Health Compare web site, their results were lower than expected—only one outcome was above, and one equal to, the national norm.

Faced with this measure of performance, the leaders at Partners set a goal to bring up all 11 Home Health Compare outcomes scores to above the national average.

Project Process and Key Elements of Success

Partners utilized OCS reports as the core benchmark source for their agency data to measure and trend their success. They also tracked results in the CMS OBQI Reports and Home Health Compare web site, but found there were several distinct and valuable advantages to using OCS data.

First, the more immediate view and quarterly breakdowns in OCS-BBI Reports provided quick feedback and a picture of "current" performance, rather than combining pre-change data with post-change data in one metric. Second, they did a lot of digging into the data to look at the outcomes of specific patient populations using the OCS reports. Third, the branch level reporting in OCS-BBI Reporter let Partners identify differences in patient population and in outcomes at each of the agency's locations.

With ten outcomes on the agenda to improve, managers at Partners Home Care decided to take a comprehensive and broad-based approach to performance and quality improvement. They invested a considerable amount of time in evaluating the details and root causes of their performance by evaluating differences in assessment practices and drilling-down to look at the outcomes of subsets of patients.

They took what they learned from that process and put together a plan of action to improve processes, with a heavy focus on accurate data collection and appropriate patient assessments. Experienced clinicians collaborated to create a mini competency evaluation that all clinicians at Partners are now

required to take when they first join the team and on an annual basis in addition to an on-going yearly training program. Though this program applied to the entire organization, Partners was also able to customize training and educational offerings to each location to meet their specific needs.

Throughout the entire project, Partners Home Care placed tremendous value in communicating their success. They divided their communication strategy into two categories—external and internal education. When it came to sharing their results with the outside world, Partners found a lot of value in advertising their positive outcomes in their marketing materials. Hard data helped them differentiate themselves from competitors and demonstrate to referral sources the quality of care they provide.

Their internal education goal was to make certain the entire Partners staff understood performance measurement and quality outcomes, why they are important, and the progress being made. They attacked this goal through departmental newsletters, a Performance Improvement news series sharing the positive results of their work, communication boards, and matrix demonstrations of improvement compared to national norms.

Process Defined and Implemented

- Identify improvement needs
- Investigate causes—drill down into subsets of patients and specific location performance
- Determine areas of need
- Set course correction actions
- Monitor outcome for results, continuous trending of metrics
- Educate staff about what's important and celebrate success
- Promote results to external stakeholders, such as referral sources

OCS Tools Used to Support the Project

- OCS-BBI Reports, especially Executive Summary, Quality Tracking, JCAHO Reports, National Percentile Ranking, and Select Clinical Indicators

Project Results

As of April 2005, Partners Home Care had nine of eleven outcomes above the most recently published Home Health Compare results. In addition, the agency developed new OASIS assessment techniques that are now standard for all clinicians, including validation visits to evaluate inter-rater reliability.

Partners Home Care also received external appreciation for their work. Mass Pro, the Massachusetts QIO, presented Partners with an award for achieving and sustaining quality results in the measure of improvement in the status of surgical wounds.