

Minnesota's Medicare Mock Surveys

Minnesota has 79 Critical Access Hospitals (CAH). The 17 that are Joint Commission accredited are surveyed by the Joint Commission. The balance is surveyed by the Compliance Monitoring Division of the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)'s 18 trained surveyors.

CAH personnel await surveys with a combination of apprehension and eager anticipation—fearful of what findings may emerge, but at the same time eager to display their strengths and learn from the unannounced visits. The Minnesota Flex Program conducts mock surveys to help CAHs prepare for the real thing and more importantly, to help CAHs ensure the highest quality care at their facilities.

The Mock Survey

CAHs—usually through their director of nursing or director of quality—contact Judy Bergh, Flex Program coordinator, to schedule a mock survey. A week or more before arriving for the mock survey, Judy sends the CAH a suggested agenda. A typical agenda for the day-long visit focused entirely on survey preparation includes:

- General meeting with CAH leadership, including department heads, to explain what will be happening throughout the mock and real survey (20-30 minutes)
- Walk through of the CAH (two hours)
- Series of 15-30 minute meetings with individual department heads, until finished (with a lunch break at some point!)
- Closing meeting with CAH leadership, including department heads, to summarize the day's activities and observations (30 minutes).

It is up to the CAH contact (usually the DON) to identify which department heads should meet individually with Judy, and to schedule those sessions. Typically, the following departments are represented (some departments together):

- Dietary
- Health Information Systems
- Infection Control
- Lab
- Nursing and Quality
- Pharmacy
- Radiology
- Rehab
- Respiratory Therapy
- Surgery

The DON and usually one other person (to take notes) accompany Judy through the hospital. Moving from department to department, Judy maintains an ongoing dialogue with the CAH escorts about what she is seeing. It's akin to a scavenger hunt, with Judy looking for problems: unlocked and outdated medications, cardboard boxes on the floor or under the sinks, poisonous materials out in the open, obstructions in the hallways, leaky ceilings or chipped linoleum, privacy concerns (are paper charts or X-rays left out? can patient information on computer screens be seen by someone passing the nurse's station?). Are areas that are to be locked actually locked? Who has access to that locked

room? How? Who checks the temp on the refrigerator? How often? Where is it documented?

For every issue that arises, the recorder makes a note so that the staff can correct the problem. Judy will also imagine being a confused patient or a child wandering through the halls. Can she find her way around? Can she wander into areas she shouldn't? Can she get hurt or into trouble?

After the walk through, Judy meets individually with department heads to discuss what she observed, answer questions and discuss policies for their department in a general way. Judy does not read policies in detail, nor offer advice on how policies should read. Her focus is on whether the hospital has an up-to-date policy manual and what policies the hospital needs. She also asks each department head about their current quality improvement objectives, which can lead to a discussion about the distinctions among quality assurance (QA), quality improvement (QI), and the practice of data tracking without a clear QI focus.

The final meeting allows time for a broad summary of the day's activity, a last chance for questions, and the sharing of additional resources. Judy describes what the CAH might expect on a survey, offers tips on how to be prepared and how to serve as host for the surveyors. She provides the DON with a hard copy of the MDH Survey Preparation Tool, suggesting that all department heads be given copies of the sections that apply to them.

Mock survey assistance information and contact information is online at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/flex/survey.html.