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Achieving standards of quality remain integral to good care

From audits to training, facilities strive to evaluate performance, services

By **THERESA SULLIVAN**

For many Rochester-area nursing homes and senior living facilities, it isn't enough to meet government standards. They set the bar higher and aim to achieve more.

While the state Department of Health mandates standards of quality for all nursing homes, many facilities seek additional forms of accreditation and quality control. These added measures cover all facets of a facility to ensure good care.

"Accreditation creates standards that are above the minimum that you have to meet for licensure," says Betty Mullin-DiProsa, president and CEO of St. Ann's Community.

St. Ann's Community was the first in the nation to be accredited for person-centered long-term care by the Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities, she says. Since the accreditation was earned in 2007, it has expanded to include medical rehabilitation, dementia care, adult day services, assisted living, stroke care and its aging services network.

The Jewish Home of Rochester is accredited by CARF and the Continuing Care Accreditation Commission. The facility applied for and received these dual accreditations for the first time in 2010.

The CARF accreditation means that a facility meets the highest standards in the country for rehabilitation services, explains Daniel Katz, president and CEO of the Jewish Home.

"We go for this voluntary accreditation because the standards for this organization are way above the basic minimum standards that Medicare holds us to and the state holds us to," Katz says.

In addition to seeking external accreditations, nursing homes and senior living facilities both benchmark and internally regulate their performance.

For this purpose, the Friendly Home uses audits from each department and an annual

member survey, says John Gagnon, vice president of services and administrator.

The organization also has a quality assurance committee that meets monthly, using a tracking tool to monitor specific activities of each department.

Maureen Garbach, director of health services at the Friendly Home, sees the facility establishing its own threshold by going beyond the standards of the Health Department.

St. Ann's Community established its own internal performance scorecard to assess quality in areas such as residence satisfaction, care of falling patients and medical errors. This system allows the facility to track and compare itself to other statewide organizations on a monthly basis.

"If we notice that there's a change or something that we want to pay attention to, this internal performance scorecard really helps us do that," Mullin-DiProsa says.

In addition to state surveys, input from family members, and in-service training throughout the year, the size of the Baird Nursing Home allows it to meet quality standards. With 28 beds, Baird is a small nursing home in Rochester.

"You can maintain the quality easier in a smaller facility," says Stephen Heard, owner and administrator of Baird.

In order to maintain standards, facilities often define quality for their organization. Katz defines three dimensions of quality at the Jewish Home: quality of clinical care, quality of service and quality of life.

Quality of clinical care is the responsibility of a facility's full-time medical staff. To attain quality of service, the Jewish Home examines the satisfaction of residents and families through regular satisfaction surveys. Quality of life regards the holistic aspect of patient life by tending to the patients' spiritual and emotional needs.

To evaluate the quality of their service and care, facilities benchmark themselves against others. Benchmarking allows facilities to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in comparison with the other organizations. The Senior Health Alliance of Greater Rochester, a group of five large non-profit senior living facilities, enables this comparison.

The alliance is composed of St. Ann's

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Community, the Episcopal Church Home, the Friendly Home, the Jewish Home and St. John's Home. Within the alliance, members confidentially compare notes in areas such as satisfaction surveys.

"We share this information so that we can learn from each other, and that's been one of the great things about this alliance," Katz explains, "because it really is about sharing best practices."

A benchmarking tool that St. Ann's Community uses is Equip, a software package developed by the New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging. With data from both state and national facilities at their fingertips, users can compare patient care results against those of other organizations.

One benchmarking statistic that is a special source of pride for the Friendly Home is its staff retention percentage. The home has a 13 percent average yearly turnover rate, which Garbach says is significantly below the national average.

"Happy staff means satisfied members and families," she says.

Before people can begin work at a facility, they must meet licensure qualifications and undergo extensive orientation. Heard notes that people hired at the Baird Nursing Home must be certified nursing assistants or have professional degrees and licensure before orientation.

The Jewish Home has ongoing clinical and non-clinical training. Anne Olinger M.D., the facility's interim vice president of medical services, says its staff and development group plays a teaching role in the facility. Sensitivity training ensures that the staff understands the aging process and the barriers that accompany it.

Before being hired at the Friendly Home, potential staff members undergo background checks and drug screening and submit personal references. Once hired, new staff members train with other staff before working on the floors. Peer mentors help new employees to assimilate into the working environment.

The Friendly Home ensures that the same certified nursing assistant and nurse provide a resident's care five days a week, Garbach says.



File Photo

The Friendly Home is part of the Senior Health Alliance of Greater Rochester, a group of five large non-profit senior living facilities that evaluate and compare the quality of their service and care.

Maintaining high-quality care in a nursing facility can be challenging, however. Mullin-DiProsa highlights reimbursement by the state as a major challenge to St. Ann's Community. Medicaid rates do not adequately cover the costs of care.

With the need to offer competitive salaries and benefits, it also is challenging for St. Ann's Community to find the right employees. And the current economic climate makes things hard.

The process of attracting new members also has changed. Consumers are much more educated today on long-term care than in years past, Garbach says. Through Internet research, potential residents already know what

they want. They no longer simply choose a nursing home in their area; instead they seek the facility that best meets their needs.

These facilities acknowledge that respect is regarded as crucial by patients. As a faith-based organization, the Jewish Home says it seeks to perpetuate a tradition of respect for one's parents and applies it to all patients.

At St. Ann's Community, the value of each person also is recognized.

"We believe that our job is caring for the most important people on earth," Mullin-DiProsa says.

Theresa Sullivan is a Rochester Business Journal intern.