

A painting of a hot air balloon basket with two people inside, floating against a textured, colorful sky. The basket is red and blue, and the people are silhouetted against the bright background. The overall style is painterly and expressive.

CUSTOMER CARE MEASURES UP

ASSISTED LIVING PURSUES
EVIDENCE-BASED QUALITY AGENDA

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LAYING THE

CUSTOMER, WORKFORCE SATISFACTION LINKED



Quality:
'The totality of features of a service that meet or exceed customer needs and expectations.'

Leaders in the assisted living profession have long recognized the need for a comprehensive and balanced quality agenda. Quality needs to be clearly defined and measures implemented that can quantify improvement. In this article, we will review those measures that research and practice show are most critical in the improvement process.

Leaders in the profession are aware of the benefits of establishing a comprehensive quality agenda that

becomes part of any organization's daily operation and service plan. In 2008, the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) published its "Guiding Principles for Quality in Assisted Living."

In the guiding principles, NCAL called for quality assurance systems for assisted living providers that are focused on customer satisfaction and experience.

The guiding principles called for the development of other measures of assisted living performance, including staff retention, turnover, and

2008 ASSISTED LIVING CONSUMER AND WORKFORCE SATISFACTION

We look closely at the data to see what's being said and to determine where opportunities exist.

WHAT SHOULD ASSISTED LIVING MEASURE AND WHY?

A successful quality agenda requires organizations to measure the appropriate information.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

The profession has a great opportunity to set a clear direction and identify how quality will be defined, delivered, measured, and improved.

FOUNDATION

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satisfaction; accidents and incidents; medication management; and grievances. In looking to the future, for those outcome measures to be used as a comprehensive quality-assurance program by state regulatory agencies, providers, and consumers, it is necessary that they are universally defined and applied across providers. But how do we get there?

Today, comparable data for quality measurement and improvement in assisted living can be difficult to come by. Unlike other sectors within health care, assisted living quality measurement is limited by a lack of standardized outcomes, or even standardized care delivery models.

Assisted living has evolved over time in response to localized consumer needs and regulatory environments. With this evolution, a number of care delivery models and types of communities—complicating the availability of consistent measurement systems—have been developed.

My InnerView has worked with assisted living communities since 2003, helping providers develop quality management systems to monitor and improve their performance in critical areas. A cornerstone of that initiative, called the Assisted Living Quality Profile™, is a standardized measure of consumer (resident and family) satisfaction.

In this article, we will examine the emerging quality paradigm for assisted living, look at potential uniform measurement systems that can be used across diverse assisted living communities, and provide summary results from two of the most commonly applied measures of quality in assisted living—consumer and workforce satisfaction.

Consumer, Workforce Satisfaction In Assisted Living

One definition of quality that is often used in senior care services is: “The totality of features and characteristics of a service that meet or exceed customer needs and expectations.” By any definition, quality in senior care must have a primary focus on the customer’s needs and expectations.

As a key component of the emerging quality paradigm in assisted living, customer satisfaction measurements are fundamental and can help providers determine where they stand, what their strengths are, and what areas present the greatest opportunity for improvement.

Consumer and workforce satisfaction data are two areas in which there is a strong national trend toward consensus, not only in the importance of measurement but toward consistency in that measurement.

Throughout the course of the past six years, My InnerView has worked with more than 1,500 assisted living communities, assessing the level of satisfaction found among their

residents, family members, and staff. The results of these surveys clearly demonstrate that assisted living providers are doing a good job of meeting consumer expectations and fulfilling consumer needs.

When asked about their experience with assisted living communities:

- 91% of consumer survey respondents indicate that they would recommend their assisted living community as an “excellent” or “good” place to live.

- 76% of workers in assisted living communities would recommend their community as an “excellent” or “good” place to work, while 86% would recommend their community as an “excellent” or a “good” place to receive care.

Survey results show that the care, responsiveness, and respectfulness of staff are among the top drivers of the outstanding ratings of assisted living service. Atmosphere and the comfort of the resident’s apartment also figure prominently in driving this high satisfaction.

Survey respondents 2006 to 2008

	2006	2007	2008
CONSUMER RESPONDENTS			
Surveys returned and percent of total			
Family members	6,015 48%	11,154 50%	12,732 51%
Residents	6,630 52%	11,128 50%	12,318 49%
Total respondents	12,645	22,282	25,050
WORKFORCE RESPONDENTS			
Nursing	1,603 21%	1,847 21%	2,250 18%
Personal care	1,992 26%	2,221 25%	3,745 30%
All other staff	4,172 54%	4,901 55%	6,329 51%
Total respondents	7,767 55%	8,969	12,324
COMMUNITY COUNT*	621	981	1,126

FIGURE 1 **Community count* is unduplicated total of communities completing consumer and/or workforce satisfaction surveys.

CONSUMER RESULTS

More than 25,000 assisted living residents and their families responded to My InnerView satisfaction surveys in 2008. These responses were evenly split between residents and their families. (See FIGURE 1, page 3)

By an overwhelming majority, consumers (residents and their families) of assisted living communities were satisfied with their experience. Ninety-one percent (91%) rated their experience as either “excellent” or “good.” When asked how they would recommend the community to others, 92% said they would recommend the community as either “excellent” or “good.” These outstanding results are consistent when looking at more specific aspects of the care and service.

In terms of the quality of the staff in the community, 89% rated the staff as either “excellent” or “good.” The “Quality of Life” domain received an 89% rating. The domains of “Environmental Quality,” “Quality of Service,” and “Billing/Charges” were all rated as either “excellent” or “good” by more than 80% of respondents, as was “Dining Experience” at 80%. The domains focused on service, billing, and dining all had a somewhat lower level of “excellent” ratings (39%, 32%, and 37%, respectively), whereas the staff, life, and environmental domains were evenly split between “excellent” and “good.” (See FIGURE 2)

	EXC	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Global satisfaction	46%	45%	7%	1%
Quality of staff	46%	43%	9%	2%
Quality of life	44%	45%	9%	2%
Environmental quality	42%	44%	11%	3%
Quality of service	39%	46%	12%	3%
Billing/Charges	32%	51%	15%	3%
Dining experience	37%	43%	15%	5%

FIGURE 2 May not total 100% due to rounding

Each item on the consumer satisfaction survey is ranked in order of the strength of its correlation with the respondent’s recommendation of the community to others. Items with stronger correlations are given higher ranks because they are more predictive of global consumer satisfaction. Items ranked higher have more of an effect on consumer recommendations, while items with weaker correlations have less of an effect.

Four of the top six items on the assisted living consumer satisfaction survey that have a greater effect on recommendation of the community are related to the quality of the workforce. Figure 3 identifies the top 10 items that matter most on the consumer satisfaction survey.

Coupling the “what matters most”

factor in context with the actual scores of individual items, it is possible to identify both strengths and opportunities in the data. (See FIGURE 4) Items that are rated as relatively more important and those that have relatively higher scores are primary strengths, while important items with lower scores are greater opportunities for improvement.

“Management Responsiveness” was found to be one of the greatest opportunities for improvement among assisted living providers, along with opportunities to “Grow as a Person” and “Comparison of Charges (Price).” Primary strengths include the competency and responsiveness of staff, along with “Personal Assistance Needs Met,” “Homelike Atmosphere,” and “Care (Concern) by Staff.”

What matters most to assisted living consumers

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Care (concern) of staff | 6 Staff responsiveness |
| 2 Choices/preferences | 7 Personal assistance needs met |
| 3 Competency of staff | 8 Healthcare needs met |
| 4 Management responsiveness | 9 “Grow as person” opportunities |
| 5 Home-like atmosphere | 10 Comfort of room/surroundings |

FIGURE 3

Consumers identify strengths and opportunities

STRENGTHS

- Competency of staff
- Responsiveness of staff
- Personal assistance needs met
- Home-like atmosphere
- Care (concern) of staff

OPPORTUNITIES

- Management responsiveness
- “Grow as person” opportunities
- Comparison of charges
- Choices/preferences
- Quality of amenities

FIGURE 4

WORKFORCE RESULTS

Employee surveys were conducted in more than 600 assisted living communities in 2008, encompassing the opinions of 12,000 workers. (See FIGURE 1) Satisfaction among workers at assisted living communities is considerably higher than that measured in the nation's skilled nursing facilities.

■ 75% of employees in assisted living communities reported that their satisfaction was either "excellent" or "good."

■ 86% of those employees would recommend the community where they worked as either an "excellent" or a "good" place to receive care.

Drilling down into the individual items that make up the survey, supervision rated high, with 73% of respondents finding the domain of "Supervision" to be either "excellent" or "good." "Training" received a 68% rating, and "Management" was the lowest-scoring area on the survey, at 62%. (See FIGURE 5)

By comparison, in the skilled nursing setting, as reported in My InnerView's "2008 National Survey of Consumer and Workforce Satisfaction in Nursing Homes," workers rated their overall satisfaction at 67%, with training, supervision, and management rated at 61%, 63%, and 48%, respectively.

The top three most important items to employees were "Care (Concern) by Management" (Management Cares), "Attentiveness of Management" (Management Listens), and

"Clear Guidelines by Management." (See FIGURE 6)

Weighting the scores on the survey with the importance of the items, strengths, and opportunities are identified. (See FIGURE 7)

Satisfaction rates among assisted living workers vary by job description as well. (See FIGURE 8)

Administration and housekeeping/maintenance have the highest rates of employee satisfaction, while nursing and personal care workers have



the lowest. The newest workers in an assisted living community often have the highest overall satisfaction. (See FIGURE 9)

What matters most to assisted living workforce

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Management cares | 6 Work makes a difference |
| 2 Management listens | 7 Fair evaluations |
| 3 Clear guidelines by management | 8 Quality of skill training |
| 4 Staff respect for residents | 9 Adequate equipment and supplies |
| 5 Help with job stress and burnout | 10 Support of career |

FIGURE 6

Workforce identifies strengths and opportunities

STRENGTHS

- Support of career
- Fair evaluations
- Appreciation of supervisor
- Care (concern) of supervisor

OPPORTUNITIES

- Help with job stress and burnout
- Management cares
- Management listens
- Clear guidelines by management
- Quality of skill training

FIGURE 7

Workforce satisfaction by domain

	EXC	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Global satisfaction	36%	43%	17%	4%
Work environment	26%	42%	22%	10%
Training	22%	47%	23%	7%
Supervision	38%	35%	18%	9%
Management	24%	38%	25%	12%

FIGURE 5 May not total 100% due to rounding

Satisfaction by job description

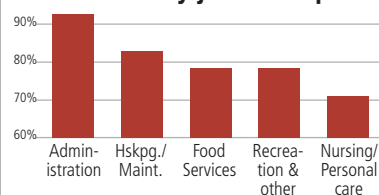


FIGURE 8 "Excellent" and "good" responses

Satisfaction by length of service

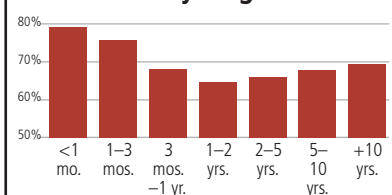


FIGURE 9 "Excellent" and "good" responses

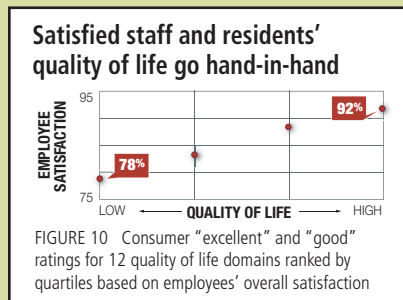
Interdependence Of Consumer And Workforce Satisfaction

What is critical for any provider to note is the relationship between employee satisfaction and resident quality of life. Many of the same factors that underlie employee satisfaction also predict family satisfaction. These data provide solid empirical evidence for the interdependence of core organizational systems that drive quality.

Knowing that management cares and listens is important to both consumers and to employees. Staffing issues

are important to residents and their families, and both of these areas represent significant opportunities for improvement to providers.

In communities that conduct both consumer and workforce surveys, patterns of interdependence between staff issues and consumer satisfaction are seen. When the community has a satisfied and committed workforce, families are more likely to be satisfied with and to recommend the community highly to others.



What Should Assisted Living Measure And Why?

For a quality agenda in assisted living to be successful, it is important that the profession adopt a core set of uniformly defined measures that can be used by regulators, consumers, and providers to measure performance, compare between providers, identify best practices, and measure progress.

In choosing a core set of metrics for any organization or profession, certain characteristics of a meaningful measurement system must be considered. Fundamentally, for any organization, the data that are collected and used for performance measurement must be aligned with that organization's strategy. If strategy is important for business success, then monitoring key metrics that give evidence of progress toward those goals and objectives makes perfect sense.

Strategies may be different from one provider organization to another, but if the goal is to develop measures that allow for meaningful comparisons of performance to be derived, common ground must be found.

Another important factor that must be considered is the ability to define measures that are important to the consumer. If the ultimate arbiter of



quality is the consumer, then it is incumbent upon the organization to align its strategies and measurement systems to the consumers' needs. Further, core metrics must apply to a broad basis of providers, be clearly defined, be measurable by all participants, and provide actionable results.

NCAL, in its guiding principles, has recognized the importance of developing measures that will be useful to regulators, as well as to consumers and providers. Any measure used by a regulatory agency should put the consumer experience and satisfaction at center stage. Outcome measures used by agencies should identify areas where communities provide top performance and excel at meeting the needs of consumers and not focus on minimum regulatory compliance.

In developing core metrics, it is important to consider the following principles. Core metrics must:

- Represent a multidimensional approach across important aspects of quality.
- Identify consistent top performance across providers.
- Not unfairly be of advantage or disadvantage to any particular type of provider based on characteristics of the provider that are independent of the quality of services delivered.
- Be carefully designed to represent both predictive and constructive validity.

Beginning in 2003, My InnerView has worked closely with a number of assisted living communities to help define and refine key performance measures that are critical to their operational and quality success.

In addition to the critical fundamental domains of consumer and workforce satisfaction, these standard measures available through My InnerView's Assisted Living Quality Profile™ include occupancy measures related to the financial sustainability of the community; staffing metrics, including turnover, retention, and absenteeism; and clinical measures, including medication administration, weight monitoring, skin monitoring, and falls.

These measures have been validated with My InnerView client communities, as well as focus group research,



into what measures are meaningful and useful for assisted living.

Why Benchmark?

The underlying reason for benchmarking is to learn how to improve your business processes and thereby increase your competitiveness. Organizations choose to benchmark outstanding companies whose business processes are analogous to their own.

Benchmarking allows you to identify those practices that have facilitated those successful companies' superior performance and that can be adapted to your own business. Accordingly, benchmarking is an operational process involving continuous learning and adaptation to help improve your organization's competitive position.

Where To Go From Here

As assisted living moves forward, care delivery models will continue to evolve; the regulatory and reimbursement climates will change and mature. The assisted living profession has the opportunity to set a clear direction for itself and to identify how quality will be defined, delivered, measured, and improved. Measurement systems must be developed that will support that model. Providers' use of consumer and workforce satisfaction data to facilitate quality improvement is one example of how these measurement systems can be put to use by providers today.

This article was written by Brad Shiverick, CPHQ, My InnerView. For more information, visit www.myinnerview.com or call (715) 848-2713. My InnerView is an applied research company that promotes evidence-based management practices in U.S. senior care organizations. Research conducted in 2008 by My InnerView.

KEY METRICS TO MEASURE

My InnerView recommends consideration of the following metrics, which give clear indication of being strongly correlated with valid measurement of quality outcomes.

Resident and family satisfaction — The most critical measure of quality in any senior care setting is the satisfaction of its residents, the ultimate consumer. In some cases, residents may not be capable of responding to a satisfaction survey, so the opinions of families are also solicited. Family members have a legitimate perspective on the services provided by the community, even when "their" resident is capable of responding.

Employee satisfaction and commitment — Senior care is fundamentally a people business. Research indicates, and practice supports, the fact that operational efficiency, the quality of residents' lives, and financial sustainability are correlated to employee satisfaction and commitment.

Workforce — Closely correlated with organizational performance and customer satisfaction is workforce stability, which encompasses not only turnover, but absenteeism and retention. Turnover is widely recognized as being crucial to provider success, but absenteeism is disruptive and interrupts the smooth operation of the community, while retention, often measured as the percent of employees who have been in the community for a year or more, is especially important because it represents the continuity of service and the extent to which employees can grow and develop in their roles.

Clinical and service measures — Service provided in assisted living is often less focused on clinical matters than in other settings, yet assisted living providers that can support the health care needs of their residents can help them stay in the least-restrictive setting as long as feasible. Appropriate measures for assisted living could include the items included in My InnerView's Quality Profile™ (medication administration, weight monitoring, skin monitoring, and falls), as well as incidents, accidents, and grievances. Other clinical measures include elopements, medical interventions, hospice care, and resident deaths.

Social and cultural measures — An assisted living community is more than just a health care facility; assisted living has evolved from the public's desire for individualized, person-centered care provided in the least-restrictive environment possible. Assisted living communities provide assistance with physical and health-related needs but also work to support the social, emotional, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of residents. Accordingly, providers should develop measures that help to capture these characteristics as well.

Operational measures — Census and other measures of operational quality are important indicators of a community's success. We don't always think of financial measures in the same context with other more traditional measures of quality. But financial sustainability and the quality of operational performance, such as adherence with policies, budgets, and regulations, are important to any provider and need to be considered when developing performance measures for an organization.



What should I measure and why?

Understanding resident, family and employee satisfaction helps you determine where you stand, what your strengths are and what areas present the greatest opportunity for improvement.

- >>> Ensure collection of the data that matters most to support your quality agenda**
- >>> Understand key drivers that lead customers to choose you over the competition**
- >>> Ensure positive word of mouth recommendations to drive long-term financial performance**
- >>> Stabilize staff turnover and achieve better financial results**

My InnerView's Organizational Performance Improvement Solution provides affordable satisfaction survey instruments, quality-improvement tools and education for a wide range of service and provider types. Better position resources, achieve desired strategic objectives and measure what matters most to customers and employees.



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