



NCAL's Guiding Principles for Quality in Assisted Living

The National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) believes in quality improvement programs and performance excellence for the assisted living profession. Performance objectives, data collection, benchmarking, measurement of resident and family satisfaction and workforce development are some of the components of a quality improvement program. These tools may be used by providers, residents, family members and staff in providing quality services and care in assisted living communities.

Adopting a common definition of quality can provide the assisted living profession with an infrastructure for quality improvement programs. A common definition of quality creates a baseline and an opportunity for benchmarking. NCAL uses the following definition of quality:

“Quality is the combination of care and services that meet or exceed customer needs and expectations”

The assisted living profession continues to grow and evolve. The concepts and terms used in this document may vary from state to state and are intended to provide an aspirational framework to help promote a general understanding of quality principles in assisted living. The concepts are not to be utilized as standards of care.

More than one million people live in assisted living communities across the nation. Assisted living embraces a philosophy of person-centered care while providing assistance with physical activities and health-related needs. Assisted living communities also strive to meet the social, emotional, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual needs of its residents.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1: PERSON-CENTERED CARE

Person-centered caring focuses on meeting the individual resident's needs. Decision-making is directed by the resident and staff assistance is not task-oriented. Person-centered caring is based on the concept that the staff and management knows each resident, their history, their needs, preferences, and expectations. The staff form meaningful relationships with the residents and their family members.

Some ways to accomplish person-centered caring may include:

- Encouraging the personal development of residents, on an individual basis;
- Maximizing the resident's dignity, autonomy, privacy, socialization, independence, choice, and safety;

- Supporting lifestyles that promote health and fitness;
- Promoting family and community involvement; and
- Developing positive relationships among residents, staff, families, and the community.

Research and experience has shown that person-centered care programs have also been successful in meeting some staff-based outcomes such as reduced staff turnover, reduction in staff accidents and incidents, and higher levels of both resident and employee satisfaction.

Transitioning into Assisted Living

The process of moving into a new assisted living community may be an emotional experience for some residents and families. How the management and staff of the assisted living community respond by assisting the resident and their family members in the transition process can set the stage for the resident's long term experience. Caring staff may positively affect resident's adjustment by helping them navigate their new home. Recognizing that each resident has individual coping skills, staff should try to understand the different emotions the residents may experience during the transition process and provide the resident and their family members with a supportive attitude and a willingness to help them cope and adjust to their new home.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE # 2: ETHICAL PRACTICES AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

NCAL believes that all providers should operate their assisted living communities based on a foundation of trust. Some ways to achieve that foundation include consumer disclosure, ethical business standards and responsible financial stewardship. Residents living in an assisted living community expect these standards of operation. Providers will operate their communities and provide service with integrity.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE # 3: FACILITY MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

Facility mission and vision statements may be two components of an assisted living quality improvement program. Mission statements incorporate a community's purpose and values. Vision statements focus on resident, family, and staff satisfaction and strive for progress and continuous improvement while maintaining the same core values. Staff training in both mission and vision statements can positively affect the assisted living community's quality objectives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE # 4: QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

NCAL believes all assisted living and residential communities should consider developing and implementing a quality program that best serves the needs of the residents and their families.

Core components may include:

- Data collection on selected areas;
- Analysis of the community's performance against defined objectives and benchmarks;
- Identification, development, and implementation of process improvements; and,
- Consistent reassessment for continued effectiveness.

Once an assisted living community's program is implemented, benchmarking with other providers within the local, state and national community may be used as a measurement tool. Benchmarking may focus a community on a specific quality improvement area or on a specific level of performance.

Performance Outcomes, Data Collection and Benchmarking

Quality improvement programs use different tools which may be used for data collection and benchmarking. Assisted living communities may identify specific areas of operation to collect data on and track for benchmarking purposes. Benchmarking, defined as a standard by which something can be measured or judged, is key to monitoring and tracking the success and effectiveness of operational processes and systems used. Assisted living providers may choose to define their own benchmarks once they have a baseline in data or they may define their benchmarks on a local, state, or national level, depending on availability of data.

Some areas of care and operations that may be tracked and benchmarked in an assisted living quality improvement program include:

- Staff retention and turnover;
- Staff and resident accidents and incidents;
- Medication management systems;
- Resident, family, and employee satisfaction.
- Resident and family grievances

Performance Analysis and Presentation Tools

Performance analyses can be completed in many different ways. The key to successful analysis is finding the method that fits the needs and style of the assisted living community. Analysis can take place through the use of decision matrices, flow charts, fishbone diagrams, storyboards, etc. or other mechanisms. A decision matrix is a tool that displays different solutions weighed against specific criteria such as costs and benefits. Storyboards display the process of the collected data, possible solutions and decision making. They can include graphics, charts, diagrams— any type of display that explains the “story” of the process with minimal text. This method can be displayed throughout the process improvement so that all staff, residents, and family members can keep up with the progress. Flowcharts are used to document the sequence of steps in a process and help the staff identify duplication of work or unnecessary steps to a process. Finally, fishbone charts illustrate the cause and effect of systems in place and help staff identify weaknesses. Assisted living communities should consider the use of metrics and tools that compliment their improvement programs.

Improved Processes and Plans of Action

Once data has been collected and analyzed, alternative solutions and processes can be created to streamline the specific process for increased efficiency and customer satisfaction. Key to this step is the input from and brainstorming by the staff. It is important to not only utilize the staff that are closely related to the specific area of review, but also to utilize staff not as familiar with the chosen process for new and perhaps, unbiased perspectives. Once alternative solutions have been created and approved, an action plan for implementation may be created. The action plan could include the “to do” list, who is responsible for each area, defined timeframes for tasks to be completed, and tools for measuring whether the action achieved the intended outcome.

Reassessment for Continued Success

The key to continuous quality improvement is the “continuous” step. A one time review of processes and systems in a community will not guarantee future successes. Customers’ needs and expectations change. New residents move into the assisted living community. Community operators must keep up with those ever-changing needs and expectations to be successful.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer opinion and satisfaction are two elements commonly included in systems designed to measure quality. Customer satisfaction may be broken down into three groups: residents, family, and employee. Resident and family satisfaction are highly individualized measures of quality. What one resident may be satisfied with may be completely opposite of what another resident or their family member deems important. This makes the concept of measuring satisfaction extremely challenging. It is important to measure the degree of satisfaction our residents and families have with the individual services offered in our communities, such as quality of life and quality of care. It is equally important to evaluate common satisfaction measures that providers can benchmark against other providers in their larger community and nationwide, such as overall satisfaction with the community and the likelihood of referring an assisted living community to a friend or colleague.

The measurement of customer satisfaction may include these steps:

- Requesting the resident and/or family member complete a satisfaction survey or tool on a regular basis.
- Allowing the respondent to remain anonymous in their completion of the satisfaction tool.
- Have an unbiased, independent third party collect the completed tools and compile the data.
- Communicate results and targeted areas of improvement (based on those results) to the residents and family members and staff in a timely manner.

Grievance Resolution Process

It is important to have a clearly defined process by which residents and families can express their concerns and grievances. The manner in which concerns are received and managed demonstrates an important measure of the assisted living community's commitment to quality of care and resident satisfaction. A structured concerns and grievance policy and process is part of person-centered care. When concerns and issues are continuously addressed, higher levels of customer satisfaction can be attained.

Measuring Quality of Life

Quality of life encompasses many different aspects of daily life in assisted living. The components that may be measured to assess quality of life include:

- Providing an environment that allows choice and embraces a person-centered approach;
- Facilitating positive relationships and providing personally rewarding activities;
- Meeting of the resident's religious and spiritual well-being;
- Respecting one's privacy and dignity; and,
- Encouraging a level of independence a resident is able and encouraged to maintain.

NCAL acknowledges these areas as very important for the assisted living community to measure, but it is also aware that these areas are more difficult to benchmark because each resident has different standards that are highly individualized.

Measuring Quality of Care

Measuring a resident's quality of care has many of the same challenges as measuring quality of life. Responses are based on individual expectations and standards which are sometimes difficult

to benchmark against a community standard. Assisted living providers may consider surveying residents and families about their levels of satisfaction with factors that contribute to a resident's quality of care on a regular basis. Some of these factors may include:

- Satisfaction with ancillary services (e.g., dietary, housekeeping, laundry, maintenance, transportation);
- Satisfaction with nursing or personal care provided to the residents (both scheduled and unscheduled needs);
- Satisfaction with medication management systems;
- Satisfaction with service planning for the resident and the level of participation in the process by the resident and family members;
- Adherence to the resident service plan; and,
- Satisfaction with the timeliness of communication with residents and families about issues and concerns.

Accurate and timely resident assessment prior to the resident moving in and consistently thereafter will contribute greatly to the level of satisfaction a resident and family member may have with the facility. Matching the needs and expectations of the resident and family member to the services and capabilities of the facility are key to high satisfaction ratings.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE # 5: WORKFORCE

Operational leadership is key to meeting the needs of our residents through the development and support of the workforce. Research and experience has shown that a higher level of satisfaction among assisted living staff directly correlates with higher levels of satisfaction among residents and their family members. An enhanced work environment leads to increased staff satisfaction, increased staff retention, and decreased staff accidents and incidents. Staffing related data may be collected on and analyzed on a regular basis. Staffing research has identified the following components that may contribute to an enhanced work environment for all staff:

- Organizational commitment to staff
- Training and education for all levels of staff
- Career ladders and lattices that provide advancement
- Recognition and rewards program
- Resources needed to complete job available on a timely basis
- Management training for all supervisory level staff
- Timely and concise communication from facility leadership
- Employee satisfaction surveys

Conclusion

Quality management in assisted living is an ongoing program based on the needs and expectations of residents, family members, and staff. Long range success will happen when the assisted living provider recognizes that those needs and expectations change over time and that community operations, systems, and processes must also change and improve as customer needs and expectations change.

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