
PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Team-Based Scheduling Practices

Mississippi

Summary

The Division of Health Facilities Licensure & Certification at the Mississippi State Department of Health implemented a team-based approach to scheduling long term care surveys in Spring 2005, following the establishment of permanent survey teams in Fall 2004. The two changes were implemented with the goals of improving surveyor job satisfaction and retention, strengthening survey consistency, and enhancing the efficiency of the survey scheduling process.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Mississippi's team-based scheduling approach, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering implementing a team-based approach to scheduling surveys. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

Permanent teams were designated in Fall 2004 to address observed issues of inconsistency across surveys and interpersonal conflict among surveyors, both of which appeared to be associated with variable team composition for each survey. Team-based scheduling was introduced several months later as a strategy to reinforce team bonding, empower surveyors with decision-making authority, and enhance the efficiency of the survey scheduling process.

Intervention

The agency's 26 long-term care surveyors are assigned to five permanent teams. Although the majority of the surveyors work from home-based offices, all are required to participate in a monthly on-site prep meeting at the agency office in Jackson. Scheduling for the upcoming month is accomplished by individual teams during the monthly meeting, and typically requires approximately 30 minutes of team discussion. Each team surveys approximately four facilities each month. Teams designate a team leader for each survey during the scheduling process and

ensure this responsibility is rotated among team members. Teams consult with a supervisor to assist with resolving problems, as necessary.

Each team receives a list of facilities due for surveys, compiled in advance by supervisors who ensure that required time frames are considered, and a calendar with the date of the on-site prep day for the coming month and other predetermined commitments already designated. When assigning facilities to teams, supervisors consider surveyors' past association with facilities (e.g., employment as a Director of Nursing or nurse consultant) to avoid potential conflict. Teams must schedule a small number of facilities to meet CMS' off-hour survey requirement, with survey start times in the early morning, evening, weekend, or on a holiday. Because several long-term care surveyors also are qualified to survey ICF/MR facilities, the affected teams must accommodate one to two ICF/MR facility surveys each month. Managers identify other necessary parameters in the scheduling documentation provided to teams. Schedules are submitted to a supervisor for final approval.

Implementation

Composition of the permanent surveyor teams was determined by supervisors. Teams were designed to provide balanced representation of surveyor expertise, clinical training, and survey experience; surveyor strengths and weaknesses; effective interpersonal relationships; complementary surveying approaches; and region of residence, particularly given the telework

status of the majority of long term care surveyors.

Supervisors guided the surveyor teams through the scheduling process when team-based scheduling was first initiated. The teams assembled in a conference room, one team per table. Each team received a list of facilities and a calendar for the coming month. The majority of surveyors adapted quickly to the process, although some initial challenges included assigning appropriate facility sizes to most effectively accommodate surveyor leave requests and allotting sufficient time to complete written reports.

Impact

Surveyors have provided positive verbal feedback regarding the transition to permanent teams and team-based scheduling. Agency management perceive that team bonding and greater control over work schedules have contributed to enhanced job satisfaction and morale, and anticipate a positive influence on surveyor retention.

The surveyor teams have been effective overall in scheduling surveys to meet indicated parameters and requirements, requiring minimal schedule modifications during supervisory review. Supervisors note that assignments from peers (e.g., for team leader) are often better received than assignments by supervisors.

Agency management perceive that the consistency of permanent teams has resulted in greater consistency across surveys. In addition, the combination of permanent teams and team-based scheduling has increased the efficiency of the scheduling process, due to substantially reduced supervisory time commitment to scheduling and a streamlined process.

Agency management report that the permanent team and team-based scheduling practices have

increased the number of surveys conducted each month, allowing the agency to more effectively meet required time frames.

Although they support the surveyor empowerment associated with team-based scheduling, supervisors had to adjust to the resultant loss of supervisory control.

Lessons Learned

Agency management staff emphasize the importance of ensuring the support of supervisors prior to implementing permanent teams or team-based scheduling.

With regard to assigning facilities for team scheduling, agency management has observed that supervisor efforts to consider the surveyors' region of residence and individual and team preferences regarding volume of overnight travel is valuable to surveyor morale.

When first designating team composition, management advise avoiding pairing surveyors who frequently conflict and challenge one another in their observations or determinations of survey findings. At the same time, it is important to assure that teams are effectively balanced so that no individuals dominate decision-making on deficiency citations, and to establish a mechanism for monitoring and investigating the reasons for notable variability in volume of cited deficiencies across teams, to ensure that observed variation appropriately reflects facility problems rather than team or dominant surveyor behaviors.

Contact Information

For more information about the team-based scheduling practice at the Mississippi Division of Health Facilities Licensure & Certification, please contact Marilynn Winborne, Acting Director, at 601/576-7326 or marilynn.winborne@msdh.state.ms.us.

This document is part of an issue brief on team-based scheduling practices in state survey agencies. The issue brief is one of a series by the Division of Health Care Policy and Research, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in state survey agencies. The entire series is available online at CMS' Website, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurvCertPromPractProj>. The issue briefs are intended to share information about practices used in state survey agencies and are not an endorsement of any practice.