New Study: Accreditation and Public Quality Ratings Go Hand-in-Hand

Accreditation of your healthcare organization is more than an opportunity to add a credential to your website. It's a chance to improve care, boost employee morale and ensure patient satisfaction.

A recent study by the Joint Commission found that accredited home health agencies performed better than non-accredited agencies on federal quality of patient care star ratings and quality measures.

At PolicyStat, an iContracts company, we're dedicated to helping you build a culture of excellence in your healthcare facility. Our software solution helps you manage the policies and procedures at your organization in order to achieve and maintain accreditation. With PolicyStat on your side, you can ensure that patient satisfaction ratings are outstanding.

The Joint Commission study on home health agencies, published last year, found that accredited organizations had higher star ratings (on a scale of 1-5) than those lacking accreditation. These differences were consistent in all three years studied. The star ratings are based on a number of factors, including:

- The timely initiation of care
- Drug education provided to the patient or caregiver
- Improvements in bed transfers and bathing
- Reduction in pain interfering with activities
- Fewer acute care hospitalizations

As well, the study analyzed data of 22 measures – 20 for OASIS, the standardized assessment used in Medicare home health care, as well as two claims-based measures. Some of the OASIS measures included:

- How often the home healthcare team checked patients for risk of falling
- How often the team assessed patients for depression

Researchers found that Joint Commission-accredited agencies performed better on a staggering 14 of the 22 measures. Non-accredited organizations, on the other hand, outperformed accredited groups on just 1 measure.

While the report did not study the reasons for the superior scores of accredited agencies, it suggested that "accredited standards establish expectations for improvement, which can be used to drive changes in behavior, such as those that require leaders to create and maintain a culture of safety."

In addition to home health agencies, there is strong evidence about the value of accreditation across a range of healthcare organizations. In 2011, the National Institutes of Health published a report based on 26 studies evaluating the impact of accreditation. It found that there was consistent evidence that accreditation improved the process of care provided to patients.

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Accreditation is associated with greater safety for both staff and patients. With appropriate policies and procedures in place, organizations can have more confidence that their environment is safe. This reduces risk and the associated costs of liability insurance and lawsuits.

One of the keys to accreditation is providing consistent and high-quality care. In order to achieve this goal, it's essential that you and your staff adhere to the policies and procedures in place at your organization. This is where PolicyStat can help. Our software:

- Tracks whether staff have read and understood the policies assigned to them, so you can be confident that staff are working to meet expectations.
- Provides alerts about expiration and review dates for policies, ensuring that you revise your policies in a timely manner to meet the most up-to-date standards.
- Makes it quick and easy to develop new policies or make edits to existing policies, and disseminate them to the appropriate staff members for collaboration, approvals, and acknowledgements.

The importance of appropriate and effective policies and procedures has been demonstrated through research by the Institute of Medicine. It has found that the majority of medical errors result from faulty systems and processes, not mistakes made by individual healthcare providers.

In its research, the Institute discovered that some of the issues include:

- Variable processes and a lack of standardization
- Inefficient processes
- A changing case mix of patients, which can cause healthcare workers to be insufficiently familiar with the appropriate systems
- Differences in the healthcare providers' training and experience

When process failures occur, the Institute recommends that inefficiencies be identified, ineffective care be red-flagged, and for everyone to understand why preventable errors happened.

In order to bring about change and install a culture of continuous improvement, the entire organization must be committed to the quality of patient care. And this starts at the top. The healthcare facility's leadership must:

- Have faith in the project and the ability of staff to successfully change. Lead the way in establishing a culture of safety and improvement.
- Communicate the goals to everyone in the organization. Since healthcare is complex and involves multidisciplinary teams, all staff must be on board.
- Invest sufficient resources, including allowing staff to dedicate time to the project.
- Encourage the team to focus and persevere. Change doesn't happen overnight.

Leaders must put the tools in place for the team to successfully implement change, and PolicyStat is one such tool. It makes it easy and efficient to create new policies and revise existing procedures. In the case of complex issues, it allows for multiple team members to provide their input quickly and efficiently.

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Embracing continuous quality improvement is a vital part of the path to accreditation. The process may seem intimidating at first – but take it one step at a time. It's important to:

- Understand the accreditation standards. Once you have a firm grasp of them, you can refer to the standards when developing programs and policies.
- Conduct an internal review to know where you stand. Be aware of which standards you already meet and what you need to accomplish for the remainder.
- Engage all staff in the process. Everyone knows that change is difficult, but if you have buy-in from your team, it will go more smoothly.
- Make accreditation a standing item in meetings. This will ensure that everyone continues to focus on the same goal.

Quality care and satisfied patients are just the beginning. Research suggests that accreditation can improve the morale of nursing and other professional staff. This results when a healthcare group adopts a culture of continuous improvement. When team members believe that their ideas for change will be considered, they feel a stronger connection to the organization.

Additionally, healthcare facilities that work with PolicyStat develop a culture where staff are proud to have a strong understanding of established policies and procedures. This ensures that care is consistently of high quality.

PolicyStat can pave the way toward attaining and maintaining accreditation by taking a seemingly overwhelming task and turning it into a manageable one. For example, consider the merger of the Jewish Hospital and St. Mary's Health Care in Louisville, Kentucky. The health system has been a PolicyStat customer for over eight years, and at the time of their implementation, it consisted of five primary care hospitals – each one with its own policies and procedures. There was little communication between the hospitals about sharing policies or discussing best practices. It took an average of five months for a single policy to be approved. One of the challenges was that 130 different managers were involved in setting and revising policies.

The hospital group carefully analyzed various options and decided to work with PolicyStat. "After a very thorough evaluation on product functionality, and taking into consideration the overall costs to implement this solution on a health system of our size, we determined that PolicyStat was our best choice," said Debbie Howell, the organization's policy and procedures manager at the time.

It was a home run for them. In just over a year, JHSMHC revised more than 4,500 policies.

"This was no small feat, considering where we started," said Howell. "We have taken basically five hospitals that were entirely independent from a policy and procedure perspective and brought them together under one roof."

The PolicyStat system allowed the organization (now part of KentuckyOne Health) to:
- Create new policies
- Track existing policy approval flow
- Improve staff efficiency
- Organize all of the policies in a single database

We know we've covered a lot of ground in this paper. As we've said, providing patients with outstanding care and ensuring customer satisfaction is an ongoing and challenging process. At PolicyStat, we're here to make it a little easier to achieve your goals. Rest assured that we'll be with you every step of the way. Please visit us online for more information about how we can help, and then be sure to see a demo of how PolicyStat can help an organization just like yours get on the path towards accreditation and higher public quality ratings.