

From the Consumer's Perspective..... What Really Matters

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She really wasn't that old, just a few years beyond 70. She had been active, vibrant, and full of vigor for all of her life, but now, her world was changing.

First she felt tired; maybe it was old age. Then her stomach began to ache, just a little at first and then more steadily, more acutely. It wasn't long before her appetite was gone, she was losing weight, and was tired.....always tired.

Visits to her doctor. Visits to a specialist. Tests, tests and more tests. And then the visit to the surgeon to hear what every one suspected, but didn't say. The problem was real. She would have to have surgery, serious surgery.

The surgeon was brilliant, so the family said. The surgery was a success, but there was so much more to be done. Not in the hospital, but at home. Home! Away from the doctors, the nurses, the support systems, the security that she had come to rely on. Home! The one place that she most wanted to be but....

And so begins the sojourn of another patient into the world of home care. What will she find? What will tell her that this new world, one where trained professionals – nurses, therapists, home care assistants – come into your home, is a positive one? How will she determine how good the services are? How will she measure quality?

Quality....from the Consumer's Perspective

Do the consumers of home care services evaluate programs, services and staff for quality? You bet they do. Do they use the same standards that our quality assessment people use in measuring quality? Well, yes and no.

Consumers want and often demand the very best care possible. Sometimes the demands come from the patient. Other times the demands come from family members. No matter who makes the demands, the one thing they are all looking for is services that meet their expectations for quality. The trouble is, quality is often defined differently depending on who is looking at it.

The vast majority of consumers lack the technical expertise to accurately assess the clinical quality of the services being provided. Is the nurse using the right procedures in cleaning the wound? Does the physical therapist know what he or she is doing with range-of-motion exercises? Does the home care assistant know the proper way to lift a patient?

Most patients have some sense of what they expect. Veterans of home care services often can compare their present experiences to those they have experienced in the past. But even the most seasoned patient most often lacks the clinical skills needed to accurately assess technical quality.

So.....What Do Patients Measure?

There is one thing, however, that patients can measure better than even the best clinician – the emotional, supportive, and caring qualities of the services they receive. It is the patients who experience the services. It is the patients who know if they feel understood, respected or emotionally cared for. It is the patients who use these standards to measure both the quality of care and the quality of the caregiver.

What do patients want? They want what everyone else wants: they want to believe they are getting the best quality of technical services possible. They also want to experience a caring attitude from their caregivers. They want to feel they are being respected, listened to, and treated with an attitude that says, "We care for you as a person, not just a billable patient."

If they don't get it or if they feel they are being taken for granted, they'll act accordingly. They'll change caregivers or agencies if they can. If they can't, telling everyone – family members, friends, physicians, and even others who may need home care - how insensitive their caregivers or the agency is. This attitude doesn't help the future of your agency.

There are three simple things caregivers can do to help patients feel the caring quality of services:

1. Treat every patient the way you would like to be treated. If it would work for you, it would most likely work for them.
2. Listen. Just listen. Who would you prefer to be around? Someone who constantly does all of the talking or someone who cares enough to listen to your anguish, fears, and concerns.

3. Show that you care. Most are in this profession because they care about people. Everyone is different, but all of us know how to express a caring attitude. Let patients know and see your caring attitude.

What Really Matters?

Patients want technical quality and also want to feel the caring, experience the emotional support, and believe they are being treated with respect. Show your caring attitude and patients will feel good about your services, talk about how good you are and be loyal to you in the future. Ignore it and your reputation for quality will be effected now.....and in the future.

The quality of your caring does matter.....for your patients and for you.

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