



Train your team on patient survey changes for star ratings success

Make sure your staff — both in the home and in the office — understand the changes to the HHCAHPS questions and how they can help drive survey success.

Effective April 1, the update means a shorter, easier-to-understand survey for the patient or caregiver filling it out. The questions are more focused on the patient's experience with the agency. It also eliminates some repetitive questions and provides examples to help the patient better understand what they're being asked.

The changes in the survey make this a great time to refresh your training for clinicians and other staff on how they can help boost patient survey scores, says Annette Lee, CEO and founder of Provider Insights of Des Moines, Iowa.

Each interaction with the patient could make a difference in the survey, she notes. For some of the questions, top scores on the HHCAHPS quality measures hinge on whether the patient responds with "always." A response of "usually" is just as bad as "never" when it comes to star ratings, Lee notes.

One bad experience will be enough to warrant a "usually" response, she says. And a patient with anything less than a stellar experience may not be motivated to fill out the survey at all.

This requires a customer-service mindset before a clinician enters the home and as soon as the receptionist picks up the phone in the office, Lee says.

"We need to ensure there's no weak link when it comes to our care team — that we're all aware of how we're being measured," she says.

Use updated survey language

Incorporating survey phrases during patient interactions is an important best practice, and it's also a good example of how training on the survey changes will help prepare staff.

For example, Lee notes the term "gentle" is embedded in the CAHPS survey questions. So, when a clinician is doing wound care, they might say, "I know this isn't comfortable, Ms. Jean. I'm going to be as gentle as a I can."

With the survey update, one of the questions asks, “In the last two months, how often did home health staff from this agency treat you with care? For example, when moving you around or changing a bandage.”

Now, when speaking with the patient, Lee notes a clinician could say, “I want to ensure I’m treating you with care as we remove this bandage.”

Prepare your office staff, too

Some of the survey questions speak to the patient’s experience outside of the home. That’s particularly true with the overall score and the willingness to recommend — the only two questions that will impact your Home Health Value-Based Purchasing in 2026.

Lee notes this means making sure your staff in the office are prepared to offer great customer service.

She highlights one agency where staff answer the phone by saying, “We’re having a great day here at ABC agency,” and then asks, “How may we serve you?”

Lee offers more suggestions on improving your survey scores:

- **Know the patient.** Make sure your clinicians, particularly at the start of care, take a few minutes before walking into the home to review the patient’s history, Lee stresses.

“That means I’m not going into the home and asking the patient the same questions they were asked 10 times in the hospital,” she says. “We want them to know we cared enough to do the homework.”

It’s also important to have a consistent care team in the home throughout the stay, building a relationship with the patient that will pay dividends in survey responses.



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IT’S VITAL THE PATIENT UNDERSTANDS THE MEDICATIONS THEY ARE PRESCRIBED, WHETHER ORAL OR INJECTABLE, AND THAT THE CLINICIANS ENSURE THEY ARE TAKING THE RIGHT MEDICATION AT THE RIGHT TIME, RIGHT ROUTE AND RIGHT DOSE.”

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- **Take a seat.** If you're standing the entire visit, it gives the feeling that you're ready to go, Lee says. Instead, you want the patient to feel like they're the only visit you have that day.

"Sit down, take a pause," she says. "It honestly won't take any longer to do that versus standing."

- **Learn your return rate.** A key factor in improving your survey scores comes with improving the number of surveys you're getting from patients, Lee notes.

"A higher return rate means a higher score and it also can then dilute any negative scores," she says.

When you have one upset patient, their response will weigh more heavily on your final scores if you're having trouble getting responses overall. But if you have a higher return rate that more closely reflects your patient population, that one bad experience won't be such a drag on your scores.

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