

Measuring Performance and Improving Care

Save to myBoK

by Jane Jeffries, associate editor

More than a few HIM professionals might look forward to a Joint Commission survey the way they would a visit to the dentist, but Sharon Sprenger, RHIA, would like to change this attitude.

"People perhaps forget that most of the people working at the Joint Commission have had other jobs before they came here. We're very normal people!" Sprenger says, laughing. "It's a shame that people fear us. We have a lot of experience and can really assist a healthcare organization in the work that it does," she adds.

As a project director at the Joint Commission, Sprenger is responsible for core measures—from initial identification of a focus area to implementation in an accreditation program. The steps between include convening expert advisory panels to evaluate core measures and developing technical specifications. Core measures are standardized performance measures that can be uniformly implemented in healthcare organizations—so outcomes can be measured across organizations.

Sprenger also keeps an eye on measures developed outside the Joint Commission. "We're working with other organizations to reduce duplication of measures and reduce the burden of data collection for healthcare organizations," she says. "Healthcare organizations have a lot of different stakeholders asking for information and in different ways. We're trying to make them more uniform."

A Range of Experience

Sprenger's interest in healthcare started early. As a high school senior, she worked part-time in the admitting department of a local hospital and then entered the medical assisting program at a community college, which led to a job in a medical records department. A few years later, Sprenger was in the first graduating class for a BS in medical records administration at Ferris State University. The years between her first job in admitting and the Joint Commission were filled with HIM positions in numerous organizations, including a professional review organization, a third-party payer where she developed a program for psychiatric managed care and audit procedures, and a staff model HMO.

Sprenger's range of experience paid off when she relocated to Chicago in 1989. "Through networking, I learned that the Joint Commission was looking for a project manager for field-testing performance measures. Because of my diverse professional experience and work in different settings, the position was a really good fit," she says.

"In this era of accountability, HIM professionals will be critical in ensuring data quality and the accuracy of information."

—Sharon Sprenger, RHIA,
Project Director, Joint Commission on
Accreditation of Health Care Organizations

For Patients' Benefit

With 11 years at the Joint Commission, Sprenger has witnessed an evolving accreditation process. Today's surveyors use laptops and can provide feedback to accredited organizations more quickly than in the past. Further, a greater emphasis has been put on standards related to patient care. The Joint Commission is also taking a look at its own processes through its Accreditation Process Improvement (API) Initiative. The API initiative represents the Joint Commission's ongoing commitment to improve the accreditation process by designing an information-driven evaluation process that individualizes accreditation for every healthcare organization.

The outlook for healthcare organization accreditation is positive, Sprenger believes. She agrees with Joint Commission president Dennis O'Leary's belief that accreditation is a risk reduction activity. "Healthcare organizations continue to recognize the importance of accreditation and how it can be used to demonstrate their commitment to quality patient care," she says.

Article Citation:

Jeffries, Jane. "Measuring Performance and Improving Care." *Journal of AHIMA* 71, no. 10 (2000): 108.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.