Quality Connected: Senior Advisor Links to Performance Improvement Organizations for Joint Commission

Save to myBoK

by Chris Dimick

Sharon Sprenger, MPA, RHIA, CPHQ, is saving lives, one performance measure at a time. Though she is not handling scalpels or running crash carts, Sprenger still considers herself a vital behind-the-scenes player in healthcare improvement.

Sprenger is the senior advisor, measurement outreach, in the division of quality measurement and research at the Joint Commission. She serves as the primary Joint Commission representative to all external efforts that focus on making credible, evidence-based performance measurement data easily available to the public and healthcare stakeholders.

The Face of the Joint Commission

Sprenger coordinates with organizations outside the Joint Commission, such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and its respective quality improvement organizations, in an attempt to harmonize their performance measure specifications and measure sets with Joint Commission efforts.

She works in some ways as the face of the Joint Commission quality measurement efforts, sitting on various panels, committees, and forums as a representative of her organization. Some of the national groups include the National Quality Forum Health Information Technology Expert Panel, the American Medical Association, and AHIMA's Quality Initiatives and Secondary Data Practice Council.

Sprenger's goal is to stay connected to the various performance measurement and quality initiatives out there and use those connections to better both the Joint Commission's efforts and the national quality movement as a whole. Internally, she serves as an expert resource on performance measurement to other Joint Commission departments.

"I really try, in my role, to keep an eye on what's going on in the national performance measurement environment," she says.

Multiple Roles

But Sprenger does more than just passively listen at these various organizations; she is also an active participant. For example, she is a member of the Hospital Quality Alliance measure work group. Each Friday Sprenger participates in the work group calls, which discuss what principal measures HQA should adopt as required measures over time.

Sprenger also takes part in various research projects developed by the Joint Commission. Currently she serves as the principal investigator for a two-year project testing nursing sensitive care measures endorsed by the National Quality Forum. Since the 15 measures were developed apart from each other, Sprenger's research group is studying test hospitals using the measures to see if they are effective and work well together in determining the quality of nursing care.

The research project, which ends in December, could eventually lead to the Joint Commission adopting these nursing care measures into their own requirements, Sprenger says. "We want to make sure that the specifications for these measures work and that everyone can consistently collect the data in the same way," she says.

Each year brings new challenges and initiatives, but Sprenger's focus always centers on improving patient care, she says. The Joint Commission "is a place that is kind of like you are writing a book, and every time you think you know how the chapter is going to end, a new one starts," she says.

Sprenger is proud of the work she has done at her organization, and she feels performance measurement has led to better healthcare on a national level. "I have had the opportunity to really see how collecting performance measurement data and

using it really does make a difference," she says.

Article citation:

Dimick, Chris. "Quality Connected: Senior Advisor Links to Performance Improvement Organizations for Joint Commission" *Journal of AHIMA* 79, no.11 (November 2008): 104.

Driving the Power of Knowledge