Hospitals and Accreditation— The Ever-changing Requirements

California is one of the most regulated states for healthcare in the country. Healthcare entities in California have many regulatory agencies that require compliance and reporting—and many of their requirements are similar but just enough different to make the process cumbersome and time consuming (and process continues to grow and expand). The Joint Commission, CMS, California Title 22, Leapfrog, Magnet, DNV/ISO, HFAP, CAP, CARF… and the list goes on.

In this period of economic hardship most organizations have limited staff resources and budgets while having increased public scrutiny on quality of care and improvised data collection and reporting capabilities.

Remaining fully accredited is also a concern while data collection and reporting capabilities are limited, manual and not actionable. How big is your accreditation and compliance problem?

Many hospitals focus their efforts around automating much of the survey preparation and monitoring the on-going process. Here are some easy steps that have worked consistently across a wide range of facilities nationally – regardless of the standards set you are focusing on.

- Someone within the organization needs to "own" the entire accreditation process in order to achieve continued success when the surveyors descend. One person should have over all responsibility for accreditation—regardless of the standard set—to ensure compliance consistency. Different staff can have individual responsibility for individual regulatory agencies, but consistency is important across all requirements.
- Meet with the chapter leaders and ensure that everyone knows their role and responsibilities.
- Once the assigned staff has determined what requirements are out of compliance, determine action plans, assign tasks and deadlines and continually monitor progress. If you find a problem in one standard set and correct the problem, the corrective actions will positively impact similar issues in other regulation sets.
- Make certain that there is someone focused on keeping all policies, procedures and other compliance documents up to date. Automate the process so that a system monitors document expiration dates and notifies the document owner. Having the documents available electronically provides huge time savings during a survey. Remember, Joint Commission changed the requirements for documentation in 2009 to require more documentation.
- When creating chart audits, environmental tours, patient safety rounds, RAC preparedness audits, and other data collection tools, keep the information

- consistent throughout the organization. Set standards for information collection so that resulting reports are consistent and meaningful. Make the information as timely and dynamic as possible to highlight areas for improvement quickly.
- Create timely education updates for staff. If you change a clinical practice, schedule short training sessions to explain the change to staff. Then build an audit to monitor how the change is working (or not working). Build monthly unit report cards so the staff can see how they're doing.
- Keep the process simple – if you want staff to comply with the data collection process and adherence to the regulations, make it easy for them to do it.

Regulatory compliance requires constant vigilance, automated systems and knowledgeable staff. The environment is continually changing (TJC sent out new requirements at the end of 2008 effective January 1, 2009 and within 2 weeks, sent out revisions). With less and less staff available to stay on top of the process, hospitals are turning to software to fill in the gaps.

Hospital Council partnered with Verge Solutions in 2006 to enable the northern California hospitals to access the VSurvey Software. VSurvey, web based software, helps healthcare organization manage an unlimited number of accreditation standards, collect and monitor process improvement data and build action plans to correct non-compliance quickly, comprehensively and easily.

For more information, or to see a free webcast that overviews the software, contact Barbara Norman, Sr. Vice President, Verge Solutions, (408) 227-1314 or by e-mail Barbara@verge-solutions.com.