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*Senator Barack Obama
Visits With Home Care
Patient John Thorton*



Feeling the Heat of Keeping Up with Changing Legal Requirements?

Your Web Site Can Keep Your Agency Cool!

By Merrily Orsini



Since providing home care involves numerous regulatory, reimbursement, and accreditation issues, home care agencies find themselves in a constantly changing legal atmosphere. States change licensure laws; accreditation associations and fiscal intermediaries modify and interpret regulations. We routinely read about new legal cases coming from the increasingly active litigious environment. This activity means home care agencies have to constantly learn what's new, modify existing policies or create new ones, and adapt to the legal ramifications on their agency. The next step is to effectively communicate the impact of these changes and their implications to staff, clients, caregivers, referral sources, and the community.

Using an agency's Web site correctly can be a great tool to address this communication challenge. If you're not used to the expanded role of the Internet in research and information, this might not seem a logical solution, but allowing a resource such as your Web site to communicate internal policy, practice, and procedure information will save your agency time, money and in the long run, lots of headaches. This article outlines strategies you can take to make your Web site a rich resource to keep staff informed about the regulatory, accredi-

tation, and legal policies and practice changes in your agency. Additionally, suggestions on using a section of your site for individual employee information are also included.

Keep Your Staff Informed and Up-To-Date

Communicating with direct care field staff can be difficult since they may work different shifts, spend varying times in the office – some being in the field all day, working from home, or using remote drop sites for paperwork. Since your clients and staff are directly affected by all regulatory, accreditation, and legal changes, it is imperative that your employees remain up-to-date and learn how to modify their work according to changes. At the very least, they need to know when changes are occurring and how to prepare for them. Establishing your Web site as the one current and reliable place for updated information decreases confusion and misinformation.

Additionally, providing individual Human Relations (HR) information such as vacation, wage, or benefit changes, for example, as well as any new client interaction directives, will prove a great asset to your communication arsenal. Here are some ways to communi-

cate those directives to your employees clearly and remotely.

- **Install an Intranet** — Although this may sound daunting and expensive, it simply involves having your employees log into a password protected area of your Web site. For a small sum, you can create a login area and have all your proprietary information behind this password-protected wall. The Web site can host a variety of information, and is accessible by employees of various levels that can include items such as regulatory, licensure changes, legal implications of these changes, agency policies, and other pertinent information. These can be divided into sections that apply to different groups of employee access based on "need to know" information.
- **Publish an Online Employee Newsletter** — Whether or not the Intranet is the solution for you, there is another alternative that can be in place of or in addition to the Intranet. By making your employee newsletters Web-based, you can email employees with ease, and then post the newsletters on your Web site so they can be accessed in the future in an archived format.

Communicate with Your Clients and Their Caregivers

Using home care can be confusing enough at a crisis time without clients, caregivers, and referral sources wondering how what they see in the news will affect their care. Rather than being reactionary, agencies should be proactive with comprehensive client communication. First, being proactive with information provides a sense of security and comfort to clients and caregivers, reinforcing that the agency is on top of industry changes, and that they are receiving the best care from an informed agency. Second, communication outreach also indicates a level of expertise which can attract new clients due to the demonstration of industry knowledge and the application of required legal, regulatory, or licensing changes.

The following are specific methods to use to stay current on issues via your Web site.

- **News Updates** — As new legal issues impact home care, discuss them on your Web site. Either post a related news article or a link to one on your home page, or use a blog (if you have one) to discuss how your agency is accommodating the required changes.
- **Online Resource Center** — Use your Web site as a virtual library or online resource center. Many times clients and/or referral sources are looking for information but don't know where to get it.

- **Speak Out** — Public relations is a powerful tool. Make certain to translate this effort to your Web site. Write Op-ed (Opinion Editorial) articles for your local newspapers about issues and show how they affect the clients in your agency. Don't limit this just to the frail or aging public. The issues of today, especially in this election year, are focused on the uninsured, budget cuts, and on wasteful spending in institutions when people can be cared for less expensively and more humanely in their own homes.

- **Keep Material Updated** — More than any other communication tool, the Web site is the agency's window to the world, and it always should be a clean and current window that has a variety of topics. Regular maintenance and current information are keys to using a Web site effectively.

Never underestimate the power of your Web site as a communication tool. If you keep in mind that you are an expert and that your current and potential clients, caregivers, referral sources, community, and staff look to you for direction and guidance, you will do well in the tumultuous environment of home care.

About the Author: Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is managing director of corecubed, an integrated marketing communications company that specializes in home care and home health industries. Merrily has been active in internet marketing since 1990. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry and currently serves on the advisory board of the Private Duty Homecare Association of America.

HOSPICE INDUSTRY SURVEY—PLEASE RESPOND!!!

The Yale School of Public Health is conducting a National Cancer Institute-funded study of the hospice industry. Hospices across the country have been randomly selected to receive invitations to participate. If you receive an invitation, NAHC urges your participation in this important research. The study will help us obtain a clear and representative picture of what is occurring in the hospice industry so that we can plan for the future accordingly. Participants will receive a special report of study results.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Marcia Mulligan, the Project Director, at 203-737-6114 or yalehospicesurvey@yale.edu. Thank you!

We'll even do our part for free.

PPS Forecaster is a free new tool from Delta that helps homecare providers easily calculate their service and supply utilization, view profit / loss, and more. With PPS Forecaster, a homecare provider may evaluate data responses one at a time in regards to changes in PPS reimbursement as well as evaluate the PPS reimbursement on a larger scale through the PPS analysis section of the tool. To find out more about this free, new tool, log on to www.deltahealthtech.com.