

HOME CARE BRIEFING®

HCB 2016 ISSUE 4

Communication in Home Care: Conveying the Essentials in New Employee and Annual Orientation

Personal care aides and home care providers work on the front lines of service and are entrusted to deliver safe, high-quality client care. The ability to communicate with clients, family members, peers, supervisors and physicians is vital to their overall success. When effective communication is lacking, home care providers are exposed to potential liability in the form of client anxieties, family dissatisfaction and critical delays or omissions in necessary care.

A well-structured orientation program reinforces for new recruits and current staff the importance of swift and thorough communication in all aspects of their job, while also allowing them to learn about core duties, create vital workplace connections and gain practical knowledge of everyday policy and procedure. This *Home Care Briefing*® summarizes in a checklist format the essential issues to convey during employee orientation, and underscores the importance of disciplined and timely communication in the home care process.

Orientation Checklist: The Essential Issues and Topics

RISK CONTROL MEASURES	PRESENT (YES/NO)	ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE ORIENTATION PROGRAM
SCOPE OF SERVICES		
Job duties and responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated to caregivers.		
Caregivers are informed of their duty to communicate to a designated supervisor any concerns caregivers have regarding job responsibilities, knowledge deficits and/or barriers to completing assigned tasks.		
The protocol for clarifying assigned tasks or client requests, in the event of ambiguity, is addressed.		
CLIENT/FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS		
Caregivers are told to discuss home care policies and services with new clients and family members, and to secure their written acknowledgement of receipt and understanding.		
Caregivers are trained to actively listen to client and family concerns, and to seek assistance in evaluating a client, when necessary.		
Caregivers are advised to reinforce in writing all spoken instructions, and to provide a duplicate copy to the client and/or family member.		
An orientation module is dedicated to honing the necessary skills required to communicate with difficult, aggressive and/or manipulative clients and family members.		

RISK CONTROL MEASURES	PRESENT (YES/NO)	ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE ORIENTATION PROGRAM
CLIENT CARE		
<p>Caregivers understand that the client care plan is the chief means of communicating clinical findings, care provisions and service needs, including:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medical diagnoses. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recent surgeries and/or hospitalizations. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presence of Alzheimer's disease or dementia. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Behavioral patterns. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Known allergies to food and drugs. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current medications, including self-administration capabilities. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expected side effects of medications and what to do if they occur. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nutrition needs, including special diet requirements, feeding abilities, and meal planning and preparation requirements. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skin integrity, including a detailed description of wounds or other skin-related conditions. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal hygiene needs. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical limitations. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fall risk and fall history. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Required transfer techniques and assistive devices. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Barriers to communication, including cultural or language variances and difficulty hearing or speaking. 		
<p>Caregivers are taught to continually evaluate client preferences, physical limitations and cognitive impairments, in order to achieve optimal care.</p>		
<p>The duty to communicate any change in a client's condition to a supervisor and/or an attending physician is underscored.</p>		
<p>Infection control and universal precaution procedures, including proper hand washing techniques, are clearly communicated.</p>		
<p>Caregivers are attuned to client confidentiality rules and procedures, and are versed in provider policy relating to social media.</p>		
<p>Written protocols that outline both appropriate and inappropriate means of client transport are reviewed.</p>		
<p>Safe driving techniques and measures to avoid distracted driving are reinforced.</p>		
CHAIN OF COMMAND		
<p>The importance of ongoing communication between caregivers and their clients and supervisors is addressed, in order to elicit questions and resolve potential conflicts.</p>		
<p>Caregivers are trained to activate the chain of command protocol when a client's physical condition deteriorates and/or their behavior adversely changes.</p>		
<p>Written parameters for when caregivers should seek supervisory assistance with respect to clinical matters are delineated.</p>		
<p>The protocol for contacting a supervisor is reviewed, including after-hour access provisions.</p>		

RISK CONTROL MEASURES	PRESENT (YES/NO)	ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE ORIENTATION PROGRAM
EMERGENCY PROCEDURES		
Clinical duties and communication requirements are reinforced in the event the following emergencies occur:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fire 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medical crisis 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Severe weather 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Equipment failure 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traffic accident 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other emergent situations 		
Caregivers are trained at an appropriate level of first aid and/or cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, and re-certification is verified and documented on an annual basis thereafter.		
The location of emergency medical supplies in a client's home, when applicable, is clearly communicated to caregivers.		
Caregivers are able to identify and remedy unsafe home conditions that may lead to client accidents and injuries, such as an elevated water temperature, loose throw rugs or improper food storage.		
Known client allergies to medications and food are clearly communicated to caregivers, along with appropriate emergency response procedures.		
Caregivers are trained to post emergency phone numbers in a conspicuous location within a client's home, including:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Doctor/pharmacy 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ambulance service 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fire department 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law enforcement 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family member/support person 		
ADVERSE EVENT MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING		
Policies and procedures relative to client safety and accident management are reviewed, including documentation requirements and communication parameters.		
Established reporting criteria are reviewed for when to call 911, contact a client's physician or family member, and notify a supervisor of a problem.		
Caregivers understand how and when reports should be filed regarding adverse occurrences.		
The duty to notify supervisory personnel within 24 hours of any significant adverse occurrence is communicated to caregivers.		
Parameters for monitoring a client's well-being are outlined, along with the requirements for prompt reporting of suspected abuse or neglect to supervisory personnel, law enforcement and/or regulatory authorities.		
Caregivers are trained to document unexplained bruises or other signs of abuse or neglect in an objective manner.		
Caregivers are instructed to report any concerns raised by family members to supervisory personnel.		
The written protocol for reporting and sequestering faulty or malfunctioning equipment is reviewed.		

RISK CONTROL MEASURES	PRESENT (YES/NO)	ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE ORIENTATION PROGRAM
ABSENTEEISM		
The protocol for reporting a work absence to a supervisor – preferably 24 hours in advance – is addressed with caregivers.		
Caregivers understand the procedural steps to take to secure a replacement provider without compromising client service, including documentation requirements.		
Responsibility for notifying a client/family member of a necessary change in staff assignment is outlined for caregivers.		

This tool serves as a reference for organizations seeking to evaluate risk exposures associated with communication parameters in home care. The content is not intended to represent a comprehensive listing of all actions needed to address the subject matter, but rather is a means of initiating internal discussion and self-examination. Your clinical procedures and risks may be different from those addressed herein, and you may wish to modify the tool to suit your individual practice and patient needs. The information contained herein is not intended to establish any standard of care, serve as professional advice or address the circumstances of any specific entity. These statements do not constitute a risk management directive from CNA. No organization or individual should act upon this information without appropriate professional advice, including advice of legal counsel, given after a thorough examination of the individual situation, encompassing a review of relevant facts, laws and regulations. CNA assumes no responsibility for the consequences of the use or nonuse of this information.

Effective communication can enhance both the experience and outcome of home care. By ensuring all staff members receive an interactive orientation program, with its emphasis on interdisciplinary communication, home care providers help to ensure that caregivers are conversant with every aspect of client care while also proactively reducing unwanted risk and liability exposures.

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