The Challenge of Defining Quality

It has often been said that whoever wins the war gets to write the history. And it really seems that this principle reigns true with quality. Except in this case, whoever controls the funding gets to write the rules.

The problem is that the definition of quality can be quite broad. When we try to define the idea, it seems as if we are trying to play philosopher. What is a quality experience? Is it as simple as personal happiness and satisfaction? We know that medical care and therapy must weigh in. Health is a part of happiness. But the definitions are difficult to confine to a single idea.

The concepts of happiness and contentment enter from stage left. The objective concepts of clinical outcomes make an entrance on stage right. They meet on stage creating a vision of choices and contrast.

And then the necessary question comes: how do we pay for it? This is where most of the subjectivity ends: with funding comes regulation.

Those controlling the funding want objective and repeatable outcomes to prove their spending was worth it. There must be justification. This is not unreasonable, but it does add another layer of difficulty to an already complex discussion. Somewhere in that mix is where we start losing the ideas of person centered care and individually defined goals.

A recent event served as a vivid example of this. On my way home from Columbus, traveling on I-71, I saw a dark plume of smoke billowing out of what could only be classified as a jalopy. The operator was driving just below the speed limit in the right hand lane. As a passed the car, I saw a picture of American heritage. Two people, windows down, the driver with his left arm out the window and the passenger with her right bare foot propped up on the right side mirror. As I pulled closer I could see genuine joy in both people. They were enjoying one another’s company. They were enjoying the wind and the freedom of the road. They were, in a word, happy. They were having a quality time, an experience money cannot buy.

And that is when it all came flooding into my mind. Money can’t buy happiness. Regulations can’t produce an environment of joy. There is no regulation that can create the experience I witnessed. And yet that is what we are tasked to do; use funding that does not cover the total cost of care and voluminous regulation to create a satisfactory experience.

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Federal Data Reflects Quality Improvement in Ohio

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The federal government’s Five Star Quality Rating System, featured on the Medicare Nursing Home Compare website, (www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare), is available as a snapshot look at skilled nursing facilities’ and states’ quality improvement performance.

One of the most useful components for consumers is the Quality Measure (QM) rating. The QM rating has information on 9 different physical and clinical measures for nursing facility residents. QMs include the prevalence of pressure sores, percent of residents with urinary incontinence or changes to resident’s mobility and more. This information is collected by the skilled nursing center for all residents.

According to September 2013 Five Star data, Ohio Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs) are demonstrating improvement through QMs featured in the ratings. Out of 944 facilities rated under the federal government’s Five Star rating system in Quality Measures, over 60% (573 facilities) achieved either 4 or 5 stars.
Certification Program for Assisted Living Executives Promotes Quality, Growth

Ohioans seeking assisted living services now have another guidepost for quality when evaluating facilities and caregivers. The Ohio Centers for Assisted Living (OCAL), through the Educational Foundation of the Ohio Health Care Association, has graduated its first 24 students from the Certified Executive in Assisted Living (CEAL) program as another step in the quest to continually improve services.

Cydney Bare, CEAL, Administrator at Medina Village Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation and one of the first to complete the program, says that one of the most important parts of the training that will benefit her residents is “having the opportunity to learn about state and federal regulations in AL/IL communities. . . the information offered will provide communities run by CEAL Executives the necessary tools to make their communities safer and more comfortable for the residents.”

CEAL, the new Seal of assisted living leadership in Ohio, aims to enhance residents’ experience and peace of mind by providing another marker of quality. CEAL is a comprehensive certification program designed to elevate the skills and professionalism of assisted living administrators in Ohio by providing a national certification, along with Ohio’s most comprehensive state specific training.

In explaining the benefit to assisted living residents, Bare says that every bit of information that is learned during the course is pertinent to the assisted living community. “Continuing education in all facets of the eldercare continuum is critical to making us all successful in this profession.” She said. “The more knowledge we have as practitioners the better care and services we can provide for our residents.”

The CEAL training course combines classroom training, self-study and hands-on, in-facility learning. Candidates must complete the four-day, 28-hour classroom and clinical curriculum, pass the CEAL examination and the National Association of Long Term Care Administrators Board’s Residential Care/Assisted Living Administrators Examination before being awarded the CEAL designation.

“I greatly enjoyed my time during the inaugural CEAL class, from the knowledgeable speakers to the valuable networking with others interested in pursuing higher education,” said Miles Parsons, Administrator, Mansfield Memorial Homes.

The next CEAL class scheduled to begin this month is already full, showing the enthusiasm assisted living professionals have for the new CEAL certification program.

The state has also improved from having over 11% (109 facilities) in December of 2012 that rated 1 star on Quality Measures to less than 5% (47 facilities) that rated 1 star as of September 2013. In fact, just over 15% (151 facilities) rate either 1 or 2 stars on QMs. That means that 85% of the facilities in the state rate 3 stars or higher on Quality Measures.

The QMs offer information about how well facilities are caring for their residents’ physical and clinical needs. More than 12 million assessments of the conditions of skilled nursing center residents are used in the Five-Star rating system.

As another reflection of continuing improvement, the number of Ohio facilities earning the designation of an overall five star rating has increased dramatically from 2008 to 2013. Five star providers have increased from 9% (90 facilities) to over 17% (167 facilities). As of September 2013, 41% of skilled care settings in the state of Ohio earned either 4 or 5 stars overall, and 62% rated 3, 4, or 5 stars overall.

Some of the base figures used to calculate ratings are weighted by the federal system to require more facilities to be designated a 1 star than are able to be designated a 5 star, skewing the numbers to the negative. However, an increase in the quality measures star ratings by Ohio’s skilled care facilities has allowed for a move toward overall improvement, which is good news for Ohio’s skilled nursing care service consumers.
Ohio’s Long-Term Care Consumer Guide

Erin Pettegrew
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Ohio is one of the few states that conducts and publishes statewide satisfaction surveys. For more than ten years, the Ohio Department of Aging has asked residents of nursing homes (and later, assisted living facilities) how satisfied they are with all facets of living in a long-term care setting.

The survey results are hosted on the improved Ohio Long-term Care Consumer Guide at www.ltc.ohio.gov, and help families compare and contrast choices for their loved ones. Also included are the inspection results and descriptions of facilities’ services. Putting satisfaction data side by side with inspections and services helps the community choose wisely when choosing a long term care provider.

As a consumer of long term care, look for facilities with high satisfaction in areas important to you or your loved one. Is your loved one active and social? Be sure to check for the activities questions and whether or not the residents are able to get outside when they like. Maybe she is a big eater or needs enticing foods to avoid weight loss? Check the meals and dining questions to be sure she will be satisfied. Residents with high care needs should be sure that direct care and nursing satisfaction is high.

Nursing and assisted living providers use the data from these surveys in their quality improvement efforts. Homes are able to look for specific areas, like the admissions process, where improvement might be needed. Or, looking at the data deeply, they can identify concerns that cross the survey domains (topical areas like “activities,” “direct care and nursing,” or “administration”) to see where common issues are likely to be affecting multiple responses.

For instance, an administrator might see that meals are not served hot, residents report not having enough time with their direct care staff and that aides don’t know what residents like and don’t like. A common solution to those problems might be the consistent assignment of staff to residents. An aide who knows her residents well and is consistently assigned to care for them, will know when they like to eat so meals can be served hot when they’re ready to eat. Consistent caregivers are also able to make the most of the time they spend with consumers and anticipate their needs by knowing the clothes they like to wear, their preferred bedtime and how they take their coffee.

Watch for the 2013 Resident Satisfaction Survey results, expected by the end of January 2014. In 2014 the Ohio Department of Aging will repeat the Family Satisfaction Survey through a mail survey.

The Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman program can help you select a provider. Please call 1-800-282-1206 to reach the program serving your area. We look forward to hearing from you!

Joy In Moments

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Life Enrichment Coordinator
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Susan Marsico
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Just because a person moves into a skilled nursing facility or other long-term care center doesn’t mean that their joy for living is a thing of the past! Which is why HCF Management Inc. recently introduced a person-centered initiative called Joy In Moments, in each of its 27 care communities.

In the program’s short existence it is already proving to make a difference! Aligning with some of Ohio’s Quality Measures, and Advancing Excellence goals, Joy In Moments is an initiative that solicits and responds to each person’s wishes whenever possible. Whether it is continuing a daily life-long habit, such as enjoying a particular kind of chocolate, or a once in a lifetime dream, such as camping in a motor home, HCF Management communities are spreading joy.

One such example occurred when Briarwood Village in Coldwater Ohio responded to a Joy In Moments request made by a few residents this summer. The residents made a trip to a Cincinnati Reds game continued on next page
accompanied by Briarwood caregivers. For two people the day was an experience not soon to be forgotten.

Mary Mescher, although hesitant about making the trip, continues to share her memories of the feel of the stadium, the excitement of the crowd, and a personal visit from Mr. Red, the team’s mascot. Don Kahlig invited his sons and wife to attend the game with him. An avid baseball fan, this was his first time to see the Great American Ball Park, and an outing that the family never thought possible.

Regardless of a person’s circumstance or where they live, joy continues – moment by moment.

Villa Springfield Earns One of Six Ohio 2013 AHCA Silver Quality Awards

Villa Springfield Health and Rehabilitation Center is a 110 bed facility owned by Covenant Care, an innovative long-term health care company founded in 1994.

Villa Springfield’s mission is to be the caregiver of choice in the communities we serve, by providing a recognized superior level of care that addresses the residents overall sense of well-being. To fulfill this mission, all employees interact with all patients, residents, customers and each other in a manner that demonstrates genuine human caring. “We are Family Serving Families” is more than just a motto, it is an attitude.

Villa Springfield was selected as one of six Ohio 2013 recipients of the Silver – Achievement in Quality for its outstanding performance in health care. The award is one of three distinct awards possible through the National Quality Award program, presented by the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL). The competitive award program highlights select facilities across the nation that serve as models of excellence in providing high-quality long term care.

The emphasis at Villa Springfield is on the complete care experience. Elizabeth Renkiewicz, Social Services, says that “I have only worked at Villa a very short time, but what I have learned is that we all help each other out. I have never worked at a place that truly is a team. I feel blessed to be a part of it.”

The decision was easy to try for the silver quality award, according to CEO Bill Robinson. “We knew we were a stellar facility, what we did not know is what was involved in the application process. It was very rewarding, challenging, frustrating and time consuming. It was an eye opening experience, and gave us an opportunity to validate some of our processes, and to fine tune some that may not be where we want them to be. It helped us to confirm that we do have things in place to ensure our residents are safe and their needs are met.”

The Villa provides individuals with customized care and attends to their specific needs. The team has made it their goal to transform typical health services in healthcare with heart.
Villa Springfield ranks in the top 10% of nursing facilities in the United States, and was recognized by US News and World Report as one of Americas top Nursing Facilities for 2013.

According to Michele Hemphill, Marketing Director at Villa Springfield, the key ingredients that determine the Villa’s success is being able to provide 24 hour admissions, exceptional clinical care, resident centered care and a good survey history, along with maintaining a 5-Star Quality Rating with CMS.

“We are collaborating with our local physician groups, Springfield Regional Medical Center (SRMC) and local healthcare service providers to implement INTERACT II,” says Hemphill. The program, designed to reduce avoidable 30 day rehospitalizations and improve quality of care, is an innovative industry initiative.

“I enjoy working at Villa because everyone here is Family to me,” says Debbie Evans, receptionist. “It makes me happy just to put a smile on the faces of our residents each day.”

Care Conversations: Changing the Conversation

Seventy percent of us will need long-term care after age 65, yet few of us openly discuss care needs and wishes.

Care Conversations (http://careconversations.org/home.aspx) is bringing people together to change this conversation trend. The website provides information and resources to get people talking with loved ones, health care providers and industry experts. Working together, we can plan and prepare for our future and ensure care needs are met every step of the way.

Care Conversations focuses on people and the honest discussions needed to plan and prepare for the future. Finding care may seem difficult or even overwhelming at first. Whether you’re seeking care for yourself or for a loved one such as a spouse, parent or sibling, Care Conversations can help you every step of the way. Worry less about tomorrow. Start a conversation today.

Getting Started with Care Conversations

Because everyone’s situation is different, no two Care Conversations will be the same. The website helps you start a conversation, explore options, and find solutions that are right for you. The website allows users to:

• Hear others share their personal experiences.
• Watch featured conversations throughout the site and in the video library.
• Learn how to start a Care Conversation.

Find us on the web:
www.careconversations.org