
PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Team-Based Scheduling Practices

Nevada

Summary

The northern office of the Bureau of Licensure and Certification at the Nevada State Health Division implemented team-based scheduling in early 2004, transitioning from the traditional supervisor-driven model of scheduling facility surveys. Supervisors initiated the change with the goal of increasing surveyor involvement in the decision-making process, enhancing staff morale, and heightening surveyor awareness of the timelines and requirements for completing surveys. The agency utilizes variable team composition for each survey, with surveyors developing schedules on a quarterly basis.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Nevada's team-based scheduling practice, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering implementing a team-based approach to scheduling surveys. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

Supervisors had been receiving complaints from surveyors regarding difficulty accommodating personal commitments due to changes in travel schedules. At the same time, agency management staff were seeking ways to improve the surveyor position, particularly given the high volume of overnight travel typical in northern Nevada. The scheduling process therefore was changed to center on surveyor discussion and decision-making, with the basic provision that the assigned workload be accomplished in specified time frames.

Intervention

The northern Nevada office employs 8.5 surveyors, who are cross-trained to conduct surveys for multiple facility types. Teams of two to five surveyors conduct long-term care facility surveys, with variable team composition for each survey. The agency does not utilize permanent teams or permanent team leaders.

All surveyors, whether office- or home-based, assemble at the regional office on a quarterly basis for a one-day staff meeting. A two-hour segment of the meeting is dedicated to scheduling facility surveys for the upcoming quarter.

Prior to the scheduling meeting, supervisors prepare a list of the facilities to be surveyed during the upcoming quarter, to ensure that CMS-required time frames are met. During the meeting, supervisors use a laptop and screen to display the facility list and a calendar for the quarter. The surveyors assign facilities to particular weeks and particular surveyors, based on group discussion of preferences and needs. Surveyors identify potential scheduling difficulties and develop solutions. Teams may choose to work 10-hour shifts if a shorter week is preferred. The rotating team leader role is assigned during the scheduling meeting by self-selection or by surveyor peers. Supervisors participate in the scheduling meeting and have final authority over scheduling decisions.

Impact

Although team-based scheduling does not alter the volume or frequency of surveyor travel, the approach allows surveyors greater influence over when and where they will participate in overnight travel, resulting in increased flexibility and ability to accommodate personal commitments and preferences. The scheduling meeting also provides an opportunity for the home- and office-

based surveyors to interact outside of facility surveys.

Supervisors report that the team-based scheduling approach has contributed to enhanced morale and job satisfaction, as well as stronger team bonding and coordination. Supervisors perceive greater willingness among surveyors to volunteer to cover for one another to accommodate personal commitments.

Although supervisor time dedicated to the scheduling process has not been reduced, supervisors have found the team scheduling approach to be more effective and less complicated for supervisors than the past method, resulting in fewer schedule iterations and greater surveyor satisfaction with schedules. Supervisors believe that significant training and support would be necessary to fully transition the scheduling process to the surveyors without supervisor involvement.

Lessons Learned

Agency management emphasized the importance of supervisor preparation prior to the scheduling meeting, to ensure clear communication of facilities to survey during the quarter and required time frames. Supervisors should strive to be open to surveyors' suggestions, and avoid imposing their own approach. Supervisors have found surveyors to be surprisingly vocal during meeting discussion, including volunteering their peers for the team leader role.

Contact Information

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This document is part of an issue brief on team-based scheduling practices in state survey agencies. The issue brief is one of a series by the Division of Health Care Policy and Research, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in state survey agencies. The entire series is available online at CMS' Website, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurvCertPromPractProj>. The issue briefs are intended to share information about practices used in state survey agencies and are not an endorsement of any practice.