

10-13-2025 Weekly Clinical Update

In preparation for an upcoming training webinar, it occurred to me that in every single training I have ever done, communication ALWAYS comes up. How do we communicate with each other? In fact, effective communication is so important that CMS included Effective Communication in required trainings for staff on an annual basis. Improving communication isn't about talking more...it's about listening better, documenting smarter, and connecting deeper. And improving communication isn't just about regulatory compliance, although effective communication is important for regulatory compliance. In reality, there is some aspect of every regulation that involves effective communication.

To begin, staff-to-staff communication is VITAL in healthcare. There are so many opportunities to improve staff-to-staff communication in facilities:

- Communication of staff-to-staff about resident condition: IT'S MORE THAN SHIFT REPORTS
 - INTERACT Stop-and-Watch tools
 - INTERACT SBAR tool
 - Staff huddles at beginning & end of shift in addition to anytime a significant (or even non-significant) event happens during a shift
 - Behavioral health huddles including triggers, de-escalation strategies and trauma-informed information in shared communication
 - Cognitive status updates including new or change in alertness, confusion or mood with potential for change
 - Medication change huddles including new psychotropic orders or GDR attempts
 - Resident-centered information in huddles to include resident preferences
 - Voice-to-text handoff logs for real-time updates
 - Communication books
 - Electronic Medical Records 24-hour shift reports, exception reports for missing documentation and other reports
- Daily Stand-Up Meetings
 - Stick to the "stand-up" part of the title & respect people's time...should be minutes, not hours
 - Review high-risk residents, new admissions, planned discharges, unplanned discharges, care plan changes
 - Track priorities
- Real-Time documentation alerts
 - Use EMR to alert next shift of changes
- Consider secure messaging platforms
 - Ensure methods are HIPAA compliant
 - Maintain shared log for behavioral incidents, skin checks, fall events or increased fall risks
- Training and Feedback
 - Provide training during new-employee orientation and AT LEAST annually
 - Point out incidents/observations of outstanding communication
 - Encourage peer-to-peer feedback and anonymous reporting for missing handoffs or breakdowns

These are just a few ideas to improve communication between staff members.

Moving on to staff-to-resident communication, this must be focused on building trust of the resident. Staff must be TRAINED on how to effectively communicate with residents. Staff must be trained to listen...not just hear the resident's words, but staff must also know that words matter. Principles of communication include:

- Personal communication:
 - 7% words
 - 38% tone of voice
 - 55% body language
- Phone conversation: must exaggerate your tone
 - 16% words
 - 84% tone
 - 0% body language
- Text/email conversation: the recipient will read between the lines for your meaning
 - 100% words

So consider teaching your staff and your team:

- ALWAYS empower the resident's voice
 - Resident council & family council participation should be encouraged
 - Timely follow-up for concerns/grievances
- Use person-centered language
 - Resident's preferred names, pronouns & communication styles
 - Use cultural competence when communicating with residents
- Listen carefully to what the resident is actually "saying"
- Avoid medical jargon; use plain language & visual cues, NEVER ELDERSPEAK & don't treat resident like a child...NEVER
- Listen with empathy
- Consider QR-coded video profiles to share preferences, routines & goals
- Ensure staff understand behavioral triggers, de-escalation strategies, and trauma-informed approaches

Considerations for communication with family members include transparency with compassion

- Provide scheduled updates and don't just communicate bad news...communicate with good news as often as bad
- Share positive photos with consent & send securely
- During care conferences provide clinical updates, behavioral observations and focus on resident/family goals
- Train staff on empathetic language & HIPAA-compliant disclosures

Again, improving communication isn't just about talking more...it's about listening better, documenting smarter and connected deeper through building relationships. When a person feels "heard", others feel informed, respected, and relationships thrive.