

Accreditation: Learn It, Live It, Love It

What you can do to be survey-ready 365 days a year.

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If you view accreditation as a one-and-done (whew!) nuisance, you're missing the opportunity to run your facility in a high-quality mode as a matter of routine. The advent of the unannounced survey could have something to do with it, but the managers we reached out to say the concept of being survey-ready 365 days a year is slowly catching on as surgical centers shift their focus from feverishly preparing for a survey to continuously improving their operational systems. The administrators and accreditation experts we talked to say being in a state of constant readiness isn't nearly as hard as it sounds.

1 Reframe the relevance of accreditation.

Articulate that accreditation is not an exercise in futility but a framework by which your facility is organized, says Ms. Carey-York. "Your staff must see the correlation between standards and the facility's policies and believe in the relevance to their everyday tasks," she says. "Clearly understanding the 'standard-policy-relevance to my job' relationship fosters ownership and creates value to their role in the facility."

2 Conduct mock surveys.

What better way to see how your facility will fare in a survey than to actually conduct one yourself? "You learn a lot from a mock survey," says plastic surgeon James A. Yates, MD, the president of AAAASF.

"You get a chance to find out where you're weak," says Ms. Carey-York, who suggests doing quarterly mock surveys. Focus on the key accreditation areas: credentialing, policies and quality improvement. Hint: Follow the standards your accreditation body provides you.

"The accreditation bodies provide standards to guide you and your staff in providing a high standard of care. By implementing these standards into facility policies, procedures and normal business operations, your facility can conduct its business in a high-quality mode as a matter of routine," she says.

Do the surveys during peak periods, not on slow days such as Fridays, says Michael Kulczycki, JCAHO's executive director. And use the business staff, because they may be able to see what others don't normally see, he adds.

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Need Help Preparing for and Passing Your Accreditation Survey?

Orthopedic surgeon Michael Clarke, MD, shuddered as soon as he took one look at the mountain of materials he'd have to wade through just to prepare for — let alone pass — his accreditation survey.

"It was overwhelming," says Dr. Clarke, the founder and owner of the Clarke Orthopedic Clinic in Springfield, Mo. "And the paperwork didn't tell me objectively what I needed to do. It just talked in generalities."

Dr. Clarke was concerned with more than getting his one-OR surgical suite accredited. He was converting the radiation/oncology clinic he'd bought into an office-based surgical facility. He had to install OR flooring and lighting, scrub sinks, sprinkler and alarm systems, sterilization equipment and waste disposal. Who had time to prepare for accreditation?

Dr. Clarke hired a consulting company to help him prepare for the JCAHO surveyor's visit. For about \$10,000,

consultants from Somnia, which is best known for providing anesthesia services and now also helps office-based facilities and ambulatory surgical centers prepare for accreditation, worked on-location with Dr. Clarke and his clinical and administrative staff to ensure that they're in line with the latest quality of care and patient safety standards. In addition, the consultants conducted in-depth education on issues such as medication management, fire safety, patient triage and evacuation, and OSHA compliance. Somnia made three two-day visits and fielded countless help-me telephone calls from Dr. Clarke and his team.

"It's a shame it has to be that way, but you need expert advice from a professional to pass your accreditation survey," says Dr. Clarke, who made three \$3,000 payments and paid for the consultant's travel and lodging expenses. Dr. Clarke wasn't satisfied with simply passing his survey (which he did). He purchased from Somnia an extended warranty of sorts so that he's survey-ready 365 days a year. As part of Somnia's ongoing maintenance program, a consultant will make one site visit this year and update Dr. Clarke's care and safety standards. The program costs \$1,500 to \$2,500 per year, says Syed Ishaq, the national director of accreditation and consulting services for Somnia.

— *Dan O'Connor*