

Leveraging accreditation dress rehearsals

Cheyenne Regional Medical Center uses regular mock surveys to gauge improvement and ensure compliance

Cheyenne Regional Medical Center

Cheyenne, Wyoming

The largest health care facility in Wyoming, Cheyenne Regional Medical Center is a 222-bed facility with more than 2,000 employees. Established as a “tent” hospital in 1867 to serve railroad workers, Cheyenne offers a comprehensive line of health care services—including cardiovascular, cancer, orthopedics, neurosciences, women and children’s services, trauma, rehabilitation, hospice and behavioral health—and has been recognized nationally for its high quality of care. The affiliated Cheyenne Medical Group has more than 75 providers in 15 locations.

There are many benefits to achieving accreditation from The Joint Commission, including better patient safety and care, greater confidence from the community and assurance that the organization meets all the requirements for reimbursement from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

However, preparing for the survey can be stressful and distracting. That’s why so many hospitals take advantage of mock surveys, where outside experts inspect the facility, conduct patient tracers and perform assessments in anticipation of the real thing. Mock surveys help identify gaps in care and compliance, provide a “dress rehearsal” for key staff members and establish a baseline for improvement.

At Cheyenne Regional Medical Center, they use mock surveys conducted by Vizient™ as an integral part of their accreditation program.

“I think mock surveys are a proactive measure to make sure you’ve got the best practices going in a very bureaucratic world,” said Margo Karsten, former CEO of Cheyenne. “You get so used to your environment, and I really appreciate the offsite look-in. From Vizient, we always get a very clear action plan, step-by-step, on how to make improvements.”

Since 2013, Cheyenne Medical has turned to Vizient on a regular basis to survey the hospital’s compliance and standards, from ambulatory care to life safety to environment of care.

“When I started here, we immediately had three mock surveys with Vizient,” said Anita Janssen, accreditation specialist at Cheyenne. “We needed to have that direction and we needed to have the experts on board, and they were there for us.”

Creating a formal process for improvement

When Karsten joined Cheyenne, she realized there was no “hardwired process” in place for accreditation.

“We were maybe a year out for a full Joint Commission accreditation, and I could tell we were going to have some gaps, and Vizient was amazing,” said Karsten. “I knew we were making progress, and so later I asked for the same survey team to come back. Again, Vizient was awesome. They gave me the same team so we could see the continuity of improvement. And I think without their help we would not have passed Joint Commission.”

Vizient plays an important role in getting Cheyenne ready for The Joint Commission survey – not only through mock surveys, but also by providing resources and references to correct the problems. Craig Luzinski, vice president of performance optimization at Cheyenne, feels that Vizient’s expertise is integral to success.

“Many people can come in and tell us what we’re doing wrong, but the Vizient resources are extremely helpful,” he said. “We get information from other facilities that have done well in their surveys and documents that help guide us with tools, policies and procedures.”

Vizient also helped Cheyenne develop a more organized approach to accreditation.

“I’m really proud of the progress that we’ve made over the last couple of years in our approach to accreditation, both for CMS and for Joint Commission,” said Luzinski. “We put a lot of work into formalizing the approach, and then moving forward to hold the individuals who are closest to the standards responsible for meeting or exceeding those standards.”

Once the mock survey is complete, Cheyenne goes to work to correct any gaps in compliance.

“The results from the mock survey are always back quickly, within ten days to two weeks,” said Janssen. “We immediately start corrective action plan meetings and setting things up with chapter owners and departments that get involved. And I rely heavily on our Vizient staff members if I have questions.”

Luzinski feels that the mock surveys from Vizient also allow the organization to allocate resources more effectively.

“As a smaller hospital, we have to be very careful about how many people we allocate to different programs,” he said. “I look at it as a cost-effective method to continue our journey toward compliance and regulatory excellence by partnering with Vizient.”

Assistance beyond mock surveys

All year long, Cheyenne staff relies on programs, events and education that Vizient Accreditation Services offers.

“We’ve taken advantage of many Vizient resources like the accreditation boot camp and the annual accreditation update,” said Janssen. “We participate in the webinars and conference calls and all of that, and I invite the appropriate staff members to attend. It really helps us stay up to date and prepared.”

For Luzinski, the monthly webinars are a big help.

“I listen to all of the webinars that Vizient offers, like the Essential Education Sessions and then the Advanced Education Sessions,” he said. “Those are outstanding. We get updates on the questions that are being asked, the focus areas and the most frequently cited areas.”

A true accountability partner

For Luzinski, it’s essential that Cheyenne health care leaders and staff stay on top of accreditation issues at all times – and they can’t do it alone.

“Accreditation is always a moving target, and we’re really in the process here of becoming Joint Commission-ready all the time. You can’t just do this every three years, especially with all the changes from CMS. I see Vizient not only being an expert set of extra eyes, but they’re an accountability partner with us, an external accountability partner.”

Karsten feels that the biggest benefit to mock surveys is the ability to clearly see how the organization is steadily improving. To get her point across, she uses an interesting analogy.

“It’s kind of like the weigh-in at Weight Watchers,” she says, laughing. “For me, from a regulatory readiness standpoint, Vizient mock surveys are the weigh-in. We may think we’re doing well and we think we’ve changed our behaviors, but just like Weight Watchers, if we don’t weigh in, we’re going to fall off.”

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