

Making accreditation readiness a routine

University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health uses multiple Vizient services to smooth accreditation

University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health

Harford County, Maryland

University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health is a community based, not-for-profit system that's dedicated to maintaining and improving the health of the people in its communities through an integrated health delivery system that provides the highest quality of care to all. In 2013, Upper Chesapeake Health formally merged into the University of Maryland Medical System to continue its commitment to northeast Maryland with expanded clinical services, programs and facilities, and physician recruitment. UM UCH includes two acute care, not-for-profit hospitals—UM Upper Chesapeake Medical Center and UM Harford Memorial Hospital.

At University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health (UM UCH), accreditation isn't something that happens every three years—it's an ongoing, everyday commitment to health care excellence.

"Certainly we're always preparing for continuous readiness for The Joint Commission and ensuring that we are compliant with all the standards for CMS Conditions for Participation," said Joyce Fox, vice president of patient services and chief nursing officer for UM UCH. "It is a culture of safety and accountability and continual improvement."

Since becoming a member in 2011, UM UCH has taken full advantage of the wide-ranging accreditation services available.

"We've been with Vizient for many, many years and have really found that their consultative services, their support, their educational programs have been a key to our success," added Barbara Finch, administrative director of patient experience and accreditation. "Whenever we have a question, we can ask our Vizient advisers and they help us get to the true issue, or help us benchmark with other hospitals."

Mock surveys that provide an objective viewpoint

UM UCH leaders feel that the mock surveys performed by Vizient—which simulate an actual survey from The Joint Commission (TJC)—are extremely helpful.

"We've utilized the mock survey process for many years, as long as we've been involved with Vizient," said Finch. "We have them come in and do the mock surveys at least a year in advance of our triennial survey, and then take the feedback and turn it into an action grid and really address every single item. Whether it be a standard or an issue, we have found them to be extremely thorough in helping us identify issues."

Once issues from the mock survey are addressed by UM UCH, the Vizient team will often return to do another survey three to six months before the real survey, further ensuring every potential problem is corrected.

“I can’t stress enough how invaluable that has been in the success for our surveys,” said Fox, “I value Vizient’s expert knowledge of The Joint Commission and they certainly are exposed to it on a continual basis. They’re going to hospitals all the time, and so they really have the information that we need. This last go-round, we had an extremely successful survey of both hospitals.”

The Vizient accreditation consultants were onsite during TJC survey, giving UM UCH leaders an even higher degree of confidence.

“It’s great to have somebody there, so that if an issue does arise, that individual is right there to help us through them,” said Finch.

High-level involvement leads to high-quality performance

The leaders at UM UCH clearly understand the importance of accreditation readiness. The Accreditation Compliance Council, which meets every two to four weeks, is composed of senior leaders from virtually every area of the organization, including the chief operating officer, Jim Hursey.

“It’s really a high-level brief with vice presidents and directors, and everyone has their specific area of responsibility,” said Fox.

The committee makes assignments to members to do tracers in certain areas, from the individual nursing units to the outpatient clinical areas. The results are placed on a report card, and any issues go on a dashboard for follow up. These reports are sent to the managers of the individual units involved, who must send an action plan for correction to the committee.

“We routinely do patient tracers, infection prevention tracers and EOC life safety tracers, and all of that information is summarized and brought back to this team,” said Finch, who currently chairs the council. “It’s a very active group that certainly is dedicated and brings a lot of enthusiasm.”

To help members stay up-to-date on new or changing regulations from TJC or CMS, Vizient summarizes the findings monthly in a continuous patient readiness plan.

“The plan format is amazing and easy to use, and we look at it each month at our council meetings to make sure we’re addressing any new items, prioritizing issues, things like that,” added Finch.

Never stop learning—or networking

In order to maintain the high levels of patient safety and clinical performance required for accreditation, UM UHC also participates in other Vizient programs, including educational webinars, an annual conference, online forums and more.

“We certainly attend as many of the educational offerings as possible, particularly the annual accreditation update,” said Finch. “We’ve been participating in that for a very long time, and certainly use the ongoing support.”

The regular webinars and the annual conference are opportunities to learn more about changing requirements and network with other members who are facing the same challenges.

“There are thousands of standards, so it seems that every time that there is a survey there’s usually an area that’s going to be a focus,” said Fox. “So in the last survey, we learned about the likely areas of focus at the educational sessions. We also learned from others at the conference and their findings from their survey. So that information really helped us, and we were able to go out and really fix some things that we had some issues with.”

Vizient also maintains an online accreditation Listserv, where professionals can connect to their peers and query the group. It’s a smart way to gain feedback and best practices from other hospitals. Plus, the forum is moderated by the Vizient team to ensure that information is timely and accurate.

“I think everybody is very in tune to the hot topics, so on the Listserv, everybody is giving advice and helping out each other,” said Finch.

Together, they’re ready for anything

Fox stresses that the Vizient relationship is built on years of trust and reliability.

“We have a great relationship with our Vizient adviser, who has been with us over the last three of four surveys,” she said. “I know the others, but we have the closest relationship with her, and she’s just become part of the team. “When I’m going to rounds with the nurse surveyor, she’s right there. She sits with us during whatever sessions that may be held and really helps to guide. If she thinks there is some response that we didn’t quite clearly give to the surveyor, we’ll go back and clarify. It really is a key part of our accreditation program.”



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