



# HOW TO BECOME A FIVE-STAR HOSPICE ORGANIZATION

Improve your hospice organization's score with effective strategies



Creating the perfect hospice organization is no easy task. You have to deal with all of the everyday issues and work tirelessly while still hoping a patient's family leave a five-star review. While reviews may not be top-of-mind for every hospice organization, they are vital to their success and survival. But there is a proven way to help reach the five-star level and become the recommended hospice organization in your area.

**The secret is to listen, learn and share with your patients.**



### **What Are Star Ratings?**

In order to understand how to become a five-star rated hospice organization, you need to understand how CAHPS (Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) scores work. Essentially, there are eight sections with 48 questions total that need to be answered by the surviving family or guardian(s) after the hospice patient has died. These questions can range from checking in on the patient about their pain to how well the family felt educated by the healthcare professional during the time of treatment. What is important to note is that anyone can see these scores, including families looking for a hospice for their loved one, or even competitors. The higher your score, the more likely your organization will get recommended and the more business you will receive.

### **Coordination of Care**

One of the most important things you can do to help boost your organization's score is to check for pain every visit, every time. But this is something that a healthcare professional should not be doing alone. It is highly recommended that they teach the patient's family and support system what to look for when it comes to pain and generally what they need to do to remedy it.

### **Training the Family to Care for the Patient**

No healthcare worker can be with a patient 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is why it is important to prepare the family to help when you aren't there. There are a lot of different aspects you should prepare the family for, including, but not limited to, side effects of the medications the patient is on, if there is trouble breathing or if there is restlessness or agitation for the patient. In fact, most of a nurse's job is to teach the patient and the family what to do when they aren't around. A good tip is to come prepared with everything written down in a notebook or on index cards for the family to keep and reference when a healthcare professional isn't present.

## Anticipating A Patient's Needs



**Part of being a strong hospice organization is employing people who can anticipate the various needs of patients.**

This ability helps those in hospice care stay comfortable and feel like they are being taken care of. Another aspect of getting anticipating a patient's needs is to have the conversation of what to expect when patients die. While this is a sensitive conversation to have with your patient, preparing them for the end of their life can help keep them comfortable and calm during their hospice stay. It also helps the family prepare for the patient's end of life.

## Help with Pain and Symptoms

Caregivers are consistently reporting on whether or not the patient received as much help with pain as possible and how often they received help with their pain. This could be anything from trouble breathing, issues with constipation or even anxiety or depression. Checking in on a patient's pain and keeping them comfortable is an easy way to boost your hospice score.

## Emotional and Spiritual Support

One of the main responsibilities of working in hospice is to be one of the many support systems for the patient. But just like your patient, you cannot do this alone. It is important to let them know that they have the support of the entire hospice organization behind them during their final months of life. This is the perfect opportunity to listen to what your patient has to say, especially concerns about end-of-life care. Learn all you can about them so you know what they need help with, what they can do independently and share as much information with them and their family as you can. Because you are the expert in this situation, the family will look to you for guidance, especially when it's time for bereavement. A best practice is to discuss any and all bereavement plans with the patient and family, so they know exactly what to expect and when their loved one passes.

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### Make it Personal

Finally, we recommend you add a personal touch to your interactions with patients during visit times. Small things like remembering the names of the patient's family or staying a bit later than when your shift was supposed to end to chat with the patient about how they are doing goes a very long way. This is because the last thing a patient would want to feel like is just another appointment in your day. Not only does your patient want to feel special, but their family also wants to feel like they are being taken care of with as much treatment as possible. This will increase the family's willingness to recommend your organization and the rating they will give.

To make it easier for your healthcare experts in the field to receive higher hospice scores, it is important to remind them that just because they are doing everything technically correct, that does not guarantee a five-star score. In fact, spending those extra five to ten minutes with a patient and their family really goes a long way to help the hospice organization. In the end, it all comes down to listening, learning and sharing with your patients and their families. Because if you can do that, becoming a five-star hospice organization will be much easier.

### About the Author



Zaundra Ellis is the Vice President of Hospice Solutions for Axxess. She leverages her many years of expertise in the hospice industry to create a software solution that is easy to use and allows clients to be clinically, administratively and financially compliant. Prior to joining Axxess, Zaundra served as the Executive Director for Kindred Hospice and Heart to Heart hospice agencies across Texas. In this role, she oversaw a hospice house, created and implemented a companywide QAPI program for an organization that served more than 2,500 patients, and used her experience to create operations that improved compliance and maximized reimbursements.