

## **098: INTRODUCING MANDATORY CRITERIA IN HEALTH CARE ACCREDITATION, PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE SURVEYED AND SURVEYORS.**

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### **Objective:**

Evaluating the initial impact of the introduction of mandatory criteria in the accreditation of Australian health care organisations.

### **Methods:**

The Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS) established 1974, is the third oldest health care accreditation organisation in the world. The ACHS Evaluation and Quality Improvement Program (EQuIP) is the ACHS framework for quality improvement used by approximately 900 organisations. Although EQuIP has always focused on quality outcomes, experience showed few health care organisations were able to demonstrate that 'what they do actually works'. EQuIP 3<sup>rd</sup> edition implemented 1 January 2003, places greater emphasis on quality and safe care in line with the national agenda of the Australian Council on Safety and Quality in Health Care. The program contains 19 mandatory criteria focusing on quality and safety, which need to be achieved at a rating level where the evaluation of activities and practices is routine to maintain or gain accreditation (there is a two year phase-in period). The aim of the new edition is to raise the bar and encourage organisations to evaluate their practice to demonstrate proven outcomes.

During February 2003 ACHS undertook qualitative research to provide base line data on the initial reaction to the implementation of the new system. 21 ACHS surveyors and 9 organisations that had experienced the new system were contacted by telephone to gather experiences using a semi-structured questionnaire. Responses were analysed question by question to allow coding of common themes. Results will provide the framework for a follow up survey (August 2003) when telephone interviews with surveyors who have done at least 2 surveys and 20 organisations will be surveyed.

### **Results:**

Introducing 'mandatory criteria' and providing clarity about the requirements to meet particular ratings created challenges for both ACHS Surveyors and organisations being surveyed. Surveyors expressed a degree of anxiety implementing a new and unfamiliar system and the responsibility of verifying requirements are met, yet remained confident that with more experience they would become more comfortable with the system. Some organisations that self-rated at the required level to comply with a mandatory criterion in their pre-survey documentation were shocked when surveyors reduced these ratings, whilst others understood and agreed with the decision. Understandably this created difficulties for organisations who had gained the high ratings under the previous system and who now faced a 'downgrade' and a possible 'fail' of accreditation. Feedback to surveyors was achieved by presentations to State/Territory meetings of Survey Coordinators, a summary was sent to all surveyors and organisations and placed on the ACHS website. Issues identified from the data will be used as a basis for the follow-up survey. The findings will also be presented at the conference. Immediate changes made from the first survey included: revising the timetable for surveys to allow time for surveyors to apply the new system; clarifying further the requirements required in order to achieve particular ratings and the development of a new tool to assist surveyors to record their ratings and comments for each of the elements within the criteria.

### **Conclusions:**

The aim of the introduction of mandatory criteria is to improve the quality of health care performance. Data are being collected on organisation ratings during the phase in period. It is too early to tell whether the aim is being achieved. However, the need for rigor in verification of the required achievement for mandatory criteria has brought with it a requirement that surveyors remain objective, apply current evidenced based practice and

have the capacity to work with the tension between encouraging an organisation to engage further in continuous quality improvement whilst ensuring the organisation complies with agreed standards of performance.