

2024

10 Steps to Increase Census at Your SNF^{V1.0}

crunchy lemons

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*Go where
the referrals are*

01



Use their software. If your biggest hospitals in the area are using a particular software to send out referrals, you HAVE to use it.

Pay whatever the annual licensing fee is to be on that platform. Don't think that you will be special and rely on them to send you old school faxes, or even use the e-fax.

Most referral systems nowadays have features that allow you to communicate back and forth throughout the referral review process, which brings us to our next point.

*Be Swift
and Simple*

02

When a referral comes through, make sure your respond to it AS FAST AS POSSIBLE. Seriously, as soon as you see it, at the very least you can mark something like “Under Review” in the software. The two biggest hangups in accepting a referral are typically the clinical approval and the payer source approval. Whoever is looking at these incoming referrals should have sufficient training to quickly screen the referral for both.

For clinical approval, you should have a quick reference sheet of clinical diagnosis that your facility will accept. (**see the included example*) This may have three categories, in our case, red, yellow, and green.

Green means **go**; if it’s one of these, accept the patient.

Yellow means **slow down**; you may need to call the referring case manager to ask some clarifying questions, and ensure your DON is on board.

Red means **stop**; you likely are not qualified to take the patient at this time.

If you are in-network with the patient’s insurance, give that payer approval. If not, you can usually mark “Pending Payer Approval” or something similar. The key is to quickly progress through the communicative stages with the referring hospital so that they see you are actively working to get that patient accepted into your facility.



*Take the
hard patients*

OB



Strong relationships with hospitals build over time. They require trust and understanding that both the SNF and hospital need each other to be successful. Everyone wants the knee replacement patient with Medicare, but it's not so simple anymore. You can eventually get those from the hospital, but you're going to have to earn it. ***Typically, you'll have to start by taking the most difficult patients, the ones that will really try your nursing team.***

Set the proper expectations with your staff, and reward them for buying into the process. Don't just wait for this to change automatically, you need to proactively communicate with the case managers that you're "scratching your back if you scratch mine."

*Find your
unique value*

04



Chances are, you have a new competitor down the road that is stealing all the good referrals. They have a big corporate name behind them, a brand new—or newly renovated—facility, and it seems like all the patients and staff want to work there. Welcome to the skilled nursing market, this is everywhere. ***Accept the fact that you won't win over patients with premium facility features, so you need to find some unique selling points to really push whenever you can.***

- Best rehab team
- Well-known individual on your team (DON, DOR, etc)
- Longevity of staff
- Oldest SNF in the area (“we know our city!”)
- Best recreation department
- Best food

Talk to your staff, and figure out what you do best. Make this part of the narrative when talking to patients and case managers about why you've been serving your community for this long.

*Capture the
online lookers*


05

When told they need a skilled nursing stay, many patients and families will want to “do their own research” and decide on which one to use. They will then typically pull up a search engine like Google and say, “best nursing home near me.” They’ll browse the first few results, and then pull up a few websites before scheduling a tour or two with the ones they like best. You need to win at each one of these stages.

First, you have to appear in the first results. If you don’t, they won’t even see you.

Second, you have to have the best and the most reviews. It needs to be clear that many people before them conducted the same search, and decided to use you.

Third, your website has to be beautiful. Once they click “Visit Website,” it needs to be optimized to display the information they need, and direct them to the proper next step.



Search |

Look best
in the hospital

06

Here's what a common process looks like when a hospital tells a patient they need a SNF. They say, "Well Mr. Old Guy, you're going to discharge in 2 days and will need to stay at a skilled nursing facility for at least a few weeks while you rehab after your operation. Here are 5 facilities in-network with your insurance that are in the area. You can review their info and let me know your preference." They will hand the patient your brochure (*they keep a huge library of all the local providers in their office*) along with some of your competitors. **The patient will then be challenged to decide based off how good your brochure looks, so you need it to look REALLY GOOD.** Don't skimp on this. Have a beautiful design with clear information and plenty of imagery to show the unique value your SNF has. Stock images are ok, but take some time in selecting them, and even better if you have professional ones of your facility. At the very least, you usually want photos of the exterior front entrance, the rehab gym, and a staged patient bedroom. Take the time to make these look good, because your competition will.



Community Events

07



Get active in your community. In small towns, this can be done by participating in local events, but use sponsorships sparingly.

Golf tournaments, Chamber of Commerce, local sports teams, and other similar opportunities will often seek advertising sponsorships from SNFs. Just realize that these rarely ever yield direct referrals, and are more likely to help you build some brand recognition over time. In larger metro markets, I think they are a waster of time and money, unless you have a specific connection or reason to believe otherwise.

Show off
on social media

08

Really just on Facebook, since that's the best platform for our market. Instagram, TikTok, and other social media platforms are a waste of time for SNF marketing, unless you're simultaneously trying to build a recruiting strategy. But Facebook is still the best one to reach your community and show them how great things are at your facility. Assign at least one employee to manage it, decide on a posting strategy, and stick to it! It is far too common to have an ambitious employee who wants to grow the page, only to have them taper off with posting because they were busy with other responsibilities or no longer work there. Some recommended employees to be Facebook admins or page managers are:

- **Administrator** - keep access to the page, but don't waste time on it
- **Marketing director** - respond to any messages or comments on the page. Periodically interact with other business accounts in the community
- **Activities director** - one of the best additions, the activities director can regularly post photos from activities with the residents
- **Social-savvy employee** - if you have someone at your building who has been asking to manage the page, it might be a good idea to give them the assignment. Construct a small bonus plan that rewards growth, posting frequency, or something of that nature that will keep them consistent over time.

Human Resources will often ask for access, but it's usually not a good idea. They tend to spam the page feed with job postings when they are facing staffing issues. This only makes you look desperate to the community and has the reverse effect on appearing as a desirable place to live and work. Remember to be consistent over time and plan for turnover, with appropriate successors in place to pick up the posting when it happens.

Employee Advocacy

09

Make your employees advocate for you. Ask them to Like your Facebook page, leave a Google Review, and recommend their friends for open positions. ***Using them to spread the word of a positive work environment will translate into creating a reputation of a positive skilled nursing facility.***

Seek their feedback. Listen to what their concerns and complaints are, and change what you can. Everyone wants a raise, so a good way to kick off a meeting of this nature could be with a question like this: “Aside from changes in pay, what are some ways we can improve as a provider and employer?” Note down their feedback, and ask for suggestions on solutions. Don’t shoot it down immediately, but explain what potential hurdles exist and why some changes may take longer.



Improve
Clinical Outcomes

10



I know this isn't a task directly related to marketing, but it needs to be on the list. ***Clinical outcomes are one of the best ways to systematically change the volume and quality of referrals you receive.*** Better star ratings allow you to get in-network with more insurances, and put you on the short list of more hospitals. Many referring providers won't consider sending to a facility unless they are rating 3+ stars by CMS.

You need to rely on your DON for this. Ensure there is a good bonus structure in place for improving clinical outcomes, and empower them to make the changes they need. We're in the business of caring for others, and that should be your first priority.

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we'd love to offer additional help.
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