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Diabetes: Managing Chronic Illnesses in a Home Care Setting



Using Your Agency Web Site as a Hospice Care Resource

By Merrily Orsini



Hospice and end-of-life care are perhaps the most sensitive types of service an agency can provide. As a palliative care option, home hospice care is one of the best and most comforting types of care for a family to experience, if they so choose. As an agency providing hospice care, informing families that this type of care is available and helping them understand what it entails is a primary function of marketing communication. The agency Web site thus most often, is the first line of communication for families.

Hospice care is an "at need" service. What this means is that, until a need arises, most people do not read about hospice, nor seek information about it. When they do seek information, it is often under emotionally stressful situations which make it difficult to maneuver personal misconceptions they might have about hospice care. In order to accommodate this, the agency Web site should be considered an educational resource for potential users.

The agency Web site should successfully promote services as well as educate users about hospice care, and a variety of other subjects that relate to end of life. What thoughts and misunderstandings face each person when the idea of hospice for self, a loved one, or a client is presented? What kinds of information do people need to know or understand

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about the end of life and how best to approach it for themselves or a loved one?

These are all potential needs that can be addressed on a hospice Web site. Remember, a great deal of learning may need to occur to erase any pre-determined misunderstandings about hospice and to educate on the extended coverage one gets with hospice services.

Because hospice care is such a sensitive and time-limited relationship, it is imperative for the agency to begin developing trust right away. The hospice Web site must be one step in relationship building. This entails including information on the site about the agency and staff that is personal, explaining the agency mission as well as details about each staff member and why each one was called to work for hospice.

A diverse listing that includes management and volunteers as well as clergy

and counselors will showcase the differentiation of hospice over other types of home care. Take the time to get professional staff photos that illuminate each staff member's warmth and compassion. Make certain to include testimonials from clients that have experienced the agency's hospice care, and have stories to share which might make it easier for others. Establishing this personal relationship with potential clients is more important with hospice care than with any other type of home care.

The more comfortable people feel with the agency and staff the more likely they are to feel at ease with the concept of hospice. They will also be more likely to seek additional information from the agency and turn to the Web site for resources and answers to questions.

Using the agency Web site as an educational resource is also vital to those who are seeking answers to the myriad of questions that arise about end-of-life care. Provide good resources in the form of coverage and service details. Include a good Q&A section that is updated on an ongoing basis as additional questions arise and get answered. Offer generic but helpful forms such as advanced directives and living wills. Although not exhaustive, below are some specific resource ideas to place on your hospice Web site.

Hospice Care Details:

Make sure to include an explanation of the service, what it entails, and the different care options available. Make this section of the site personal. The more personal the writing style, the better feel a family will get for the agency. Add links to the staff page and use professional photos whenever possible. Include a questionnaire that addresses whether home hospice care is right for the family/client. Hint: Survey Monkey is an excellent and inexpensive Web-based tool, and can be programmed easily to gather information.

Useful Forms:

As mentioned, hospice care and end-of-life needs are very foreign to most people. An agency's goal should be to help make this process easier and less mysterious. Offer useful forms for download such as advanced directives, living wills, financial aid/state compensation forms,

etc. Make sure to find forms specific to the state of operation because many forms do differ by state.

Funeral/Memorial Ideas:

In times of death, many families are at a loss for what to do. Simply providing some guides to writing an obituary or some suggestions for a funeral or memorial program are often appreciated. Easy ideas that are creative and celebrate the individual's life (much like a funeral home Web site), checklists for the end of life, or even ideas for recording a life history will be good resources for families who need activities at this time. Additionally, the site can list local funeral home or church resources for quick access.

Funding/Financial Assistance:

There are typically community resources, churches mainly, that assist in staffing or helping pay for 24/7 home

hospice care. For non-profit hospices, soliciting donations in memory of someone who used hospice would be a good way to get some extra funds. List these ideas and local resources on the site as well.

Remember, the most important aspect of hospice care is making the end-of-life transition easier and less painful for clients and their families. Any information that an agency can provide will ease this transition. With many families making preparations from a distance, utilizing an agency Web site as a 24/7 wellspring of hospice information and resources will provide an invaluable tool for both an agency and its clients.

About the Author: Merrily Christ, MSSW, is managing director of corecared, an integrated marketing communications company that specializes in home care and home health industries. Merrily has been active in internet marketing since 1999. She is an 18-year veteran of the private duty industry and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Private Duty Homecare Association of America. She was recently elected to the NAHC Board of Directors.

Accidents happen. Are you protected when they do?

It can easily happen, because your employees and volunteers have more on their minds than their driving. It may be a patient in distress, a grieving family or just the nagging pressure of falling behind a busy schedule. Auto accidents are a major cause of lawsuits against hospices and home health care agencies as well as a cause of serious injuries and lost time.

Lawsuits are expensive to defend, and some result in very high-dollar losses. That's why liability insurance coverage is so important. Hospice and Community Care Insurance Services is administered by Callahan Insurance Group, a national agency. We work closely with your insurance agent to provide competitive proposals and friendly service for special businesses like yours.



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take care of others, you have to
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