

Home Healthcare Accreditation from ACHC

Now that agencies have to turn to other sources than their States for accreditation, let's take a look at one of the newer options: Accreditation Commission for Health Care, Inc. (ACHC). Although ACHC seems to be in its infancy compared to some other accrediting bodies, it has actually been in existence since 1986.

ACHC accredits a number of different types of entities:

- HOME/DURABLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT;
- CLINICAL RESPIRATORY CARE;
- MEDICAL SUPPLY PROVIDER;
- COMPLEX REHAB and ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SUPPLIER;
- FITTER SERVICES;
- HOME HEALTH;
- INFUSION NURSING;
- HOSPICE;
- PRIVATE DUTY NURSING;
- PRIVATE DUTY AIDE; and
- PHARMACY SERVICES.

I recently had the opportunity to attend one their workshops, along with approximately 200 others. So let me share some of the information I received.

The first question is always, "How long does the process take for accreditation?"

Licensure surveys occur within about 120 days from completed contract. This survey is announced.

The average amount of time it takes a start-up Home Health Agency to go from completed contract with ACHC to receiving their survey is less than or equal to 6 months. For those Agencies who are switching to ACHC from another similar accrediting body, ACHC states they have never let anyone's accreditation lapse. Their goal after July 1st, 2009 is to survey within 100 days of a completed contract.

In reality, the closer your agency is to where a surveyor is located or if you live in the south and desire a survey – the shorter your wait time may be - by their own admission.

During the accreditation survey, the agency must have serviced at least 10 patients and have at least 7 patients active per the CMS rule. This minimum number of patients must be skilled patients, but not necessarily Medicare recipients.

The second question is, “How much does it cost?”

All agencies pay a \$1500 deposit to start. For your deposit you receive access to the customer part of the ACHC website, a Preliminary Evidence Report, and a manager that is assigned to your agency to help steer you through the process. During the workshop I overheard multiple positive comments from Agencies personnel about their ACHC managers. Managers are not nurses; however, can be of great assistance. The average total payment for a start-up Home Health Agency is \$6400.

The good news is that accreditation is good for three years. The bad news is that of all those who apply, 12 % of start-ups fail their first survey and 68% are deferred. That leaves only 20% of agencies that receive accreditation following the first survey. All those agencies that require additional surveys will be required to pay additional fees. The additional fees vary based on location, i.e. what it will cost to send surveyors back to your location to re-survey.

Consider hiring Beth Carpenter and Associates as your consultant firm before you sign the ACHC contract. Sherry Hedrick, SVP of Clinical Compliance and Accreditation, ACHC has stated, “A consultant will certainly speed up the time it takes you to go through a successful survey.”

Now that we’ve considered some initial questions, stay tuned for next month’s newsletter and learn more about the accreditation process.