It's All About Admission:
How to Perfect Your Facility's Admissions Process

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Your admissions department is critical to the success of your organization. Much more than just mere paper-pushers, this department helps ensure that residents choose your facility and that beds are always filled. In other words, they help generate the revenue that keeps your organization running.

While the admissions process should always be smooth and simple for a client, this is hardly ever the case for admission coordinators. They must consider several different factors for each and every potential resident. In other words, your admissions department must understand all the complexities involved in placing an individual in a long term care facility. If they don't, your organization could be missing out on new business.

If your admissions staff could use a little help, the following information will serve as a solid reference guide. Below, we'll look at the three main stages of the admissions process (pre admission, admission, and post admission) and discuss what each step entails.

Pre Admission: Beginning with the End in Mind
The admissions department's work begins long before a person even sets foot on your property. Your organization should always aim for early involvement with those who are just starting their search for a long term care facility. Prospective clients need to know that you understand their unique circumstances and will honor their individuality. Take a few minutes and find out what's important to your client and his/her family, such as transportation, meals, activities, religion, and special units such as dementia and Alzheimer's.

Spread the Word
In the pre-admissions stage, it's crucial that you position your organization as a reliable source for information and referrals. Hosting seminars on long-term care and related topics such as advance directives, estate planning, and Medicare is an excellent way to demonstrate your credibility and knowledge. Not only does this strategy show you're aware of the issues, but it also gets people through the door to see your facility. Ultimately, prospective clients will connect faces to your organization—happy, supportive faces who are there to help them in a time of need.

Conduct a Pre-Assessment
A pre-admission assessment should be completed to ensure that your facility is the best match for a potential resident. The assessment should begin with an interview of family members when they come to your facility for a potential admission. Discuss and document care needs, social needs, dietary needs, and preferred activities.

You'll also want to obtain the family's contact information (including e-mails, cell phone numbers, pagers etc) to ensure that someone is always reachable in case of an emergency. Lastly, before admitting anyone, run a credit check. Learning about a history of credit problems beforehand can enable you to turn down problem clients at the start or accept them with financial guarantees in place to ensure payment.

Undoubtedly, long term care placement can be a difficult decision for both the resident and family. That being said, every effort should be made in the pre-admissions stage to assure a successful transition. Giving prospects all the information they need, and having families complete all paperwork prior to the admission date will ensure a smooth transition; family members and residents can now focus on the journey ahead, as opposed to having to worry about a stack of papers.

Admission: Making the Way for a Smooth Stay

Up to this point, placement has only been an option, but when the paperwork is actually signed, it becomes a reality. Family members and the newly admitted resident will be dealing with an array of difficult feelings. Your staff must have the skills and sensitivity to handle the emotional issues family and residents experience at the time of admission.

To make everything as smooth as possible, the admission team should distribute the pre-admission assessment to all staff members (be sure to separate all financial information). Make sure they are informed of the resident's required level of care, hobbies, and other personal characteristics. Also, remind family members that they are always welcome to visit or to call their loved one to help make the transition more smooth and comfortable.

Always Remain Proactive

Staying proactive means always thinking ahead. As part of the admittance procedure, you'll want to plan for the resident's eventual departure (perhaps due to death, a higher level of care, etc) from your facility. So, it's a good idea to provide a termination agreement. This document should specify how many days notice must be given before the patient leaves and under what conditions the contract can be terminated.

Also, as a courtesy to family members, provide a list of arrangements that should be completed while their loved one is in their last stage of life. This list should include arrangements such as estate planning, creation of wills, and establishing a durable power of attorney for financial matters. Additionally, let them know about the important documents they should obtain. Documents such as wills, bank statements, and life insurance policies could play a major role if the patient becomes ill, dies or must be transferred. Providing this type of guidance establishes your facility as efficient, helpful, and mindful of patients' and families' needs.

Post Admission: Carefully Evaluating the Situation

Once a resident has been admitted and has had a chance to settle in, your admissions team needs to assess the situation and make sure everything is copasetic. Regularly check in with the patient and his/her family to make sure that your facility is everything they expected. If not, make sure they give you the specific reasons why it isn't working. And equally as important, find out what they do like about your program—this will help you determine what 's particularly effective.

In the post-admission phase, you'll want to consider holding monthly support groups for residents' families. This provides a great platform for them to discuss the thoughts and feelings that are associated with long term care placement. Consider asking some family members of previous residents to take part; these individuals have already been through the process and can share their wisdom and insight to help families with the adjustment.

Lastly, you'll want to make sure that accurate information is kept on file. Over time, family members may move or change their contact information. So, keep your admissions packets up-to-date by verifying financial data, family member names and addresses, etc once every year.

Acquiring a Top-Notch Admissions Staff
For your organization to remain successful, it's critical to have the best, most qualified admissions staff you can afford. When looking for someone to fill an admissions role you'll want to keep an eye out for the following qualifications:

- A clear understanding of residents' and family member's needs and concerns when going through the admission process.
- A working knowledge of healthcare issues.
- Familiarity with such matters as powers of attorney, healthcare directives, and financial directives.
- Ability to interact with residents and take appropriate action to accommodate them to their new surroundings
- Excellent people skills--has the ability to attract people to your facility for open houses, tours, seminars, etc.
- An understanding of residents' healthcare needs and the level of skilled care that may be required by your facility.
- Flexibility--the more flexible your admissions staff can be with their schedule, the better chance they will have of reaching potential clients.
- Exceptional facilitation skills--family disagreements often transpire in the admissions office. Admissions staff must facilitate among the differing opinions and help the family reach a mutual agreement.

If your admission staff possesses the characteristics above, chances are you will have one of the best admissions staff your community has to offer.