



## Derek Harris (MBA, BSN, RN)

Wellness Analyst  
Arrow Senior Living Management

In this Voices interview, Senior Housing News sits down with Derek Harris, Wellness Analyst with Arrow Senior Living, to learn the experience that Arrow had in going through The Joint Commission accreditation. Harris shares best practices and methods for success, and offers his take on what to watch for in 2023.

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Editor's note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
What career and life experiences or career or life experiences do you most draw from in your role today at Arrow?

**Derek Harris:** I like to reflect on my origin story both at Arrow Senior Living and in health care as a whole. It's been well over a decade now that I have been in health care, and I actually entered the arena as a housekeeper at a local hospital and worked my way up from there through nursing school. I had the pleasure of starting with Arrow Senior Living at the very first assisted living community that they ever built in the St. Louis area.

I started as a night nurse and progressed from there. That gave me the opportunity as I was rising through the ranks to understand the needs of the staff and how our care and other services are delivered. At Arrow, I originally was a regional director of wellness, and I transitioned into my wellness analyst role about two years ago.

Part of working in Arrow's analytics department is it is a very supportive role. I essentially help us execute major-level projects, such as Joint Commission accreditation. I am our main point person for our health record system, PointClickCare. I build all of our assessment tools. Essentially, all of the wellness technology and primary partnerships with our major vendors are all part of my position.

I am able to use the lessons from my career to help influence what I'm doing on a daily basis. It's so great to look back and see all this change for the better. Avoiding complacency I think is what brought me where I am today.

**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
How and why did Arrow make the decision to pursue Joint Commission accreditation for its entire portfolio of assisted living communities?

**Harris:** At Arrow Senior Living, we are always trying to be innovative and stay a step ahead, and Joint Commission accreditation is a market differentiator. Accreditation lets us prove to our residents and their loved ones that we have their best interest in mind.

What's been exciting yet slightly uncomfortable at the same time is that we had to embrace vulnerability. We had to have a thick skin. We had to put our practices to the test against these nationwide rules. In more cases than not, the rules of The Joint Commission are more stringent and inclusive than the typical state-specific regulations. It is the best possible example of a self-test: how we do as an operator and whether we actually stand behind our claims.

**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
**How did Arrow come to select its three initial facilities to undergo accreditation?**

**Harris:** We started by evaluating several criteria. Some could be subjective, some could be objective. Ultimately we conducted mock surveys on our communities and reviewed the scores of those mock surveys. The three communities that we selected were shining examples of a solid mock survey. They rarely had any major findings that required correction and their overall state surveys had little-to-no deficiencies.

We also knew that Joint Commission accreditation would be a challenge. We knew that the department heads and the executive directors alike would have to put a lot of work into the process. So when we selected communities, we looked for leadership teams and executive directors and department heads who were collaborative leaders who would embrace the challenge. We have absolutely no regrets.

**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
**How did the pilot communities prepare for the accreditation process? Are there any resources or steps that were particularly helpful?**

**Harris:** First and foremost: communication. When you're in the Joint Commission survey process, they assign what they call "recommendations," which is essentially their version of a citation from the state. The more recommendations you have, the more plans of correction that you have to produce and maintain.

Of course, just like with any survey, you want your findings to be minimal. We wanted to make sure that we had our ducks in a row, so we ensured that communication was where it needed to be. I will not sugarcoat it: we had a lot of meetings. Some of them were just people on the core Arrow team. Different regionals and other individuals from our home office were meeting about every other week. On opposite weeks, we had members of the Arrow team and our department heads.

Then, to ensure we were as prepared as possible, we consulted with a company called Achieve Accreditation. Their consultant met with the communities every other week and also met with us on the Arrow side on the opposite weeks. The meetings consisted of self-assessments and delegated tasks, all to ensure survey readiness.

As far as the resources, Achieve Accreditation had just about any resource that you could think of. For example, if The Joint Commission required us to handle our fire drills differently than what we're doing now, and we needed a new form to document it, we didn't have to start from scratch. They have a toolbox that has any Joint Commission-related form from which we can either borrow ideas or adopt completely.

And if the consultant didn't have an answer to our question, they would have other resources or would reach out to The Joint Commission personally.

**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
Are there any great lessons or quick wins that were experienced throughout the accreditation process or the post-accreditation that have shaped your approach for accrediting your other facilities?

**Harris:** Definitely. Our major consistent finding overall is that The Joint Commission focuses on the resident as a whole. They are not 100% clinically driven. That is something that I did not fully understand when we started. They really do have the residents in mind holistically.

So, how is that a quick win? It's a win because it shows that they are focused on the curve that we're seeing in health care in general. We're seeing more and more focus on not just care delivery but also being a great place to live and a great place to work, which are two of Arrow's major focuses.

As I mentioned, the three communities were selected because of their stellar executive directors and because of their great teams. In a lot of our communities, the executive director is, of course, the captain of the ship. The wellness director is focused on wellness. The plant operations director is focused on maintenance and housekeeping. People stay in their lanes. It's not so much that we're siloed, but everybody knows their duties. Joint Commission accreditation brought everybody to the table together to solve problems as an integrated team.

**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
What would be the top piece of advice that you would have for your colleagues regarding accreditation?

**Harris:** Be open to changing your processes for the better. By doing that, you will become a stronger and more effective operator.

What could we do to be a better operator and what will we have to change? As I mentioned, there were a lot of meetings, a lot of teamwork and collaboration, but it was all for the better. If an operator thinks that they are doing everything right and that they do not need to make any changes, then I think they might struggle with The Joint Commission.

If an operator is making this jump to achieve accreditation, they should be ready to change and to learn.

**Q: Senior Housing News:**  
**The senior housing industry in 2023 will be the year of...**

**“Integration.”**