Coronavirus updates

Joint Commission begins use of virtual surveys to better serve Home Care organizations
The Joint Commission resumed some survey activities of home care organizations in June, but with a new approach added to the mix — the virtual survey.

As organizations continue to grapple with the need to meet regulatory requirements without risking the safety of their clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, The Joint Commission saw an opportunity to meet both the caregiver’s and client’s needs with this virtual survey offering. The new virtual surveys include:

- **Early survey (virtual):** This survey is required for initial licensure in the states of California and Florida. The process includes a review of policies and procedures, as well as other required documents. The organization must attend a video conference with a Joint Commission surveyor to talk about their processes and documents. It is a one-day survey, followed by an appropriate on-site or virtual initial survey. An organization receives a Limited Temporary Accreditation after the early survey.

- **Initial Medicare certification survey (virtual):** This two-day virtual survey consists of a review of policies and procedures, as well as required documents. It also contains all the components of a traditional on-site survey, including interviews and discussion with patients/caregivers. The organization achieves accreditation with this survey and is required to have an additional on-site survey when the situation allows. An organization can be recommended for Medicare certification if they have no condition-level findings during the virtual survey. The organization may lose its certification during the follow-up survey if they have condition-level findings.

“Home care organizations and their staff do so much for our communities,” said Wayne Murphy, field director, The Joint Commission. “This is our way of helping these dedicated organizations continue to serve the members that depend upon their services. We’re in this together.”

For more information about the virtual survey options, call 630-792-5070 or email homecare@jointcommission.org.

Q&A webinar: Get answers on key COVID-19 home care topics
To help home care staff as they confront challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Joint Commission leaders and experts answered a variety of questions in May during a Q&A webinar. Located on the COVID-19 resources webpage, topics addressed in the webinar ranged from infection prevention and control to environment of care and life safety, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) 1135 waivers to Joint Commission standards.

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Joint Commission staff who participated in the Q&A were:

- Robert Campbell, PharmD, director, Clinical Standards Interpretation Hospital/Ambulatory Programs, and director, Medication Management
- Sylvia Garcia-Houchins, MBA, RN, CIC, director, Infection Prevention and Control
- Herman A. McKenzie, MBA, CHSP, director of engineering, Standards Interpretation Group, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- Kelly McCann, associate director, Accreditation and Certification Operations
- Wayne Murphy, field director, Surveyor Management and Development, Accreditation and Certification Operations
- Deborah Ryan, MS, RN, senior director, Field Operations, Accreditation and Certification Operations
- Linda Seager, RN, MSN, director, Clinical Standards Interpretation Group, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- Kathy Valencia, field director, Accreditation and Certification Operations
- Jennifer Welch, MBA, associate director, Accreditation and Certification Operations

Some of the questions that were addressed during the webinar included:

- Is use of scanning thermometers permitted in the home care setting? (2:26)
- What are Joint Commission recommendations to protect patients and staff from COVID-19? (3:17)
- Do you recommend home care organizations report positive COVID-19 employees to public health departments? (5:42)
- Should all caregivers be required to be fitted on N95 use? (7:05)
- A nurse with antibodies is asymptomatic. Can they still work? (8:29)
- Clarification on statement on universal masking of staff, patients, and visitors in health care settings. Statement refers to the health care workers masking when they leave their homes. Would this be at all times, even with social distancing? (10:25)
- What are the best practices to implement COVID-19 treatment procedures in home health among the clinical team? (11:51)
- What is the latest on what immunity means for people who have COVID-19? (14:09)
- In light of sparse PPE stocks, can you give some practical advice on how to enter homes, engineering controls like call ahead, etc. My home care folks still struggle with ‘the way we’ve always done it.’ (15:07)
- Are homemade cloth masks for nonsymptomatic home visits OK to use? (16:53)
- CDC has updated COVID-19 symptoms and time frames for ending home isolation several times. What is the current recommendation for nurse and patient COVID-19 screening before making a home visit? (17:56)
- Per CDC infection control and prevention guidelines, should an approved EPA hospital grade disinfectant always be used on multi-patient medical equipment (e.g., stethoscope) regardless of diagnosis (e.g., COVID vs. non-COVID)? Or, will alcohol wipes work for non-infected patients? (19:19)
- What is the responsibility for home health agencies to provide masks to patients — COVID-19 and unknown? (20:46)

Watch the webinar for the answers to these questions and more.

‘Real Voices. Real Stories.’: Shen discusses expanded role of home health during pandemic

Joint Commission staff are on the front lines of caring for patients with COVID-19, and those experiences are being shared in ‘Real Voices. Real Stories.’

A home care surveyor with The Joint Commission, Bih-Shang Shen, RN, MSN, also is a home health agency administrator. She recently discussed how the role of home health care has expanded during the coronavirus pandemic and how communication with the patient is more vital than ever.

“We sent the message to the discharge planners in the hospital that we are willing as home care agencies to monitor their COVID-19 positive patients or possible COVID-19
positive patients,” she said. “When they are waiting for their results at home, we can also help to do the phone assessment and phone follow-up if they want us to do that. We make sure we are helping the hospital and the community by monitoring the patient’s symptoms when they are home. We can also do a lot of education over the phone with these patients, such as how to isolate themselves from the other family members, wash hands and wear masks.

“The community is relying on health care workers, especially home care workers, because we are out in the community talking to the patient and the family. When we educate it’s not just patients, it’s the whole family and friends who have contact or communication with the patient. I think home care bears a big responsibility in educating the community.”

Read more “Real Voices. Real Stories.”

COVID-19 resources available for home care organizations
We hope you have found this special issue of Home Care Bulletin helpful. In this time of great uncertainty and challenges, The Joint Commission wants the health care community to know it is here to assist in any way it can.

As you continue to navigate caring for patients during this pandemic, additional resources can be found on The Joint Commission’s COVID-19 webpage, including:
- An infographic on identifying aerosol-generating procedures and how to minimize exposure
- FAQs
  - Home ventilator services
  - Managing patient care via telehealth
  - Locating CMS 1135 waiver information
- Resources and guidance from:
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- Strategies for conserving personal protective equipment.

Check out the full list of resources.

People

Gary Bachrach takes over as executive director of Home Care Accreditation program
Gary Bachrach has been appointed as the new executive director of The Joint Commission’s Home Care Accreditation Program. Bachrach is a strategic business development executive with more than 25 years of experience in a variety of health care settings, including acute care, long-term care and durable medical equipment.

As executive director, Bachrach will be responsible for driving product strategy and development for the Home Care program to meet the needs of current and prospective customers. He also will oversee integrated business development and marketing strategies for the accreditation program.

“Gary’s blended background of sales and customer-facing service operations is a strong fit for this leadership role,” said Brian Enochs, JD, executive vice president, Business Development and Marketing. “As more patients and their families turn to the home care setting for care and services, I look forward to Gary’s expertise in identifying new opportunities to grow our Home Care Accreditation Program for the more than 6,000 home care programs that we accredit.”

Learn more about Gary.