



BEST PRACTICES FOR STAFF DOCUMENTATION IN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITIES



Senior Living



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In assisted living communities, the top priority is providing appropriate care and protection for residents. A key element of this is ensuring rigorous attention to accurate staff documentation. Maintaining correct documentation not only ensures regulatory compliance but also enhances resident safety. While effective staff documentation is essential, there are several challenges for assisted living communities in maintaining accurate and comprehensive records. To overcome these challenges, adopting best practices is essential to help streamline processes, improve operational efficiency, and protect the organization from potential claims/litigation¹.

BEST PRACTICES FOR STAFF DOCUMENTATION IN AN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY:

1. **Use Electronic Health Records (EHR):** Implement an EHR system to centralize and securely store resident information, care plans, and staff documentation. Easy access to documentation provides timely and appropriate interventions for residents' care and emergencies. Furthermore, communities can analyze trends and patterns to identify areas for improvement, refine care protocols, and re-engineer redundant processes by harnessing the power of data.
2. **Timeliness:** Encourage staff to document care activities and observations promptly after each resident interaction to ensure accuracy and completeness. This provides staff with an up-to-date and clear record for each resident's medical history, preferences, and care needs, enabling personalized care plans.
3. **Objective and Accurate Entries:** Emphasize the importance of objective and accurate documentation. Avoid assumptions and document only what has been observed or reported. When documenting statements or information received from residents, quotations should be used to indicate that this represents a resident's statement.

BEST PRACTICES FOR STAFF DOCUMENTATION IN AN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY CONT'D:

4. **Clear and Legible Writing:** Ensure that all entries are written clearly and legibly to avoid misunderstandings and errors.
5. **Consistency:** Use standardized terminology and abbreviations for documentation to maintain consistency and avoid confusion.
6. **HIPAA Compliance:** Train staff on HIPAA regulations to ensure both resident privacy and the security of sensitive information
7. **Sign and Date:** Make it a requirement for all staff to sign and date all entries to establish accountability and provide a clear timeline of care. Ensure that the care provider is clearly identifiable.
8. **Record Relevant Information:** Document relevant information, including changes in resident condition, incidents, medication administration, and care interventions. Ensure any refusals of care or behaviors are also documented.
9. **Smooth Communication:** Encourage staff to use documentation as a means of effective communication between shifts and departments. Clearly identify those communicated with, such as names of family members and the information relayed to them, or any physician or care provider who have been provided information through oral reports or calls. Transparency builds trust between assisted living communities, residents, and their families. Regular updates and communication based on comprehensive documentation contribute to open and positive relationships for all involved.
10. **Delegate Responsibilities:** Distribute workload through delegation—the right person for the right job. Implement a system to track completion and review of the documentation tasks.
11. **Shift Handover:** During shift changes, promote a system of thorough and accurate handover of documentation to ensure continuity of care.
12. **Incident Reporting:** Implement a process for reporting incidents or accidents promptly, along with any follow-up actions taken.
13. **Training and Education:** Provide ongoing training to staff on proper documentation practices, including updates to policies and procedures.
14. **Audit and Review:** Assisted living communities are subject to stringent regulatory standards. Proper documentation is critical for adhering to these requirements and demonstrating compliance during inspections and audits. In addition, accurate documentation serves as a safeguard against potential legal disputes by providing a transparent record of actions taken and decisions made. Regularly audit staff documentation for compliance and accuracy, and use the findings to identify areas for improvement.
15. **Log Resident Preferences:** Document information about resident preferences, likes, and dislikes providing person-centered care.
16. **Involve Residents and Families:** Encourage input from residents and their families in the care documentation process where appropriate.
17. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Facilitate cooperation and collaboration among different departments involved in resident care to ensure a holistic and rounded approach.
18. **Foster Accountability:** Fostering a culture of accountability with regards to documentation will provide strong proof of care for facilities under inspection. Encourage open discussions, increased staff participation to aid with understanding on the importance of documentation, and create a sense of ownership and responsibility among staff .



CONCLUSION

Effective staff documentation provides evidence of exceptional care and operational excellence. By acknowledging and responding to the challenges, communities can create a solid foundation for informed decision-making. It is critical for senior living communities to demonstrate commitment to accurate, timely, and comprehensive documentation in order to maintain the highest standard of excellence in providing care to residents across the organization.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Micki joined Gallagher as a Senior Claims Advocate in January 2022, after spending over 15 years as a litigation attorney. She graduated from the University of Iowa followed by Creighton University School of Law. She is licensed to practice law in Illinois. After spending over 15 years as a defense attorney, working at defense firms and as corporate counsel at a senior living management company, Micki now brings her experience to consult with Gallagher's senior living clients on their claims, claim handling, litigation management, and coverage issues. She offers advice on how to avoid losses and works with Gallagher clients to mitigate their overall cost of risk.

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Sources:

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- ² [LTCCC-Assisted-Living-Fact-Sheet-Staff-Training-Competency.pdf, January 10, 2019](#)
- ³ [Best Practices for Assisted Living Facilities, January 31, 2018](#)

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