

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Interviewing Techniques

Performing an accurate and comprehensive assessment requires that the assessor communicate effectively with a number of individuals. An individual assessor may use the following suggestions to obtain information from residents, facility staff and resident families. There are other possible models for resident data collection and interviewing, especially when conducted by a team, which you may want to consider in your specific facility.

When conducting any interview to collect information in the RAI process, there are some general concepts that you should consider.

First, emphasize to all individuals that during your interview (i.e., residents, families and staff) that the RAI process is a way to “get to know the resident.” You should explain that the RAI assessment provides valuable information that will be used by facility staff to develop the resident’s care plan. This is an opportunity to bring residents and families into the assessment and care planning process.

Second, be flexible as to how you conduct the RAI process with each resident. It is not necessary for you to complete the assessment in the same order sequence as sections appear on the MDS form. The MDS is not a questionnaire; it is a set of common items and definitions for assessment, which provides a structure for systematically recording the information you obtain. You should let the resident’s needs guide you during the assessment process.

You may wish to use the following general techniques, if appropriate, when conducting interviews:

To elicit complete and satisfactory answers, you will often need to ask neutral or nondirective questions. **Examples are:**

- “What do you mean?”
- “Tell me what you have in mind.”
- “Tell me more about that.”
- “Please be more specific.”
- “Give me an example.”

Repeat a question if you think it has been misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Pause or hesitate to indicate that you are listening and need more or better information. This is a good technique to use while you are determining the individual’s response pattern.

Some items will require special sensitivity during the questioning process (e.g., the MDS items in Section B dealing with memory), and you should note the instructions in Chapter 3 on how to assess each item or gather the information to respond to each item.

Some respondents may be eager to talk with you and will stray from the topic at hand. When a person strays, you should gently guide the conversation back to the topic. For example you may say:

- “That’s interesting.”
- “Now I need to know...”

- “Let’s get back to...”
- “Tell me about...”

Validate your understanding of what a respondent is saying. Be careful that you do not appear to be challenging a respondent when clarifying a statement. For example you may say:

- “I think I hear you saying that...”
- “Let’s see if I understood you correctly.”
- “You said ... Is that right?”

When respondents (resident/family/caregivers) disagree or when a resident (who you believe is capable of rational judgment) says something contrary to information contained in the record, you should clarify the information. Ultimately, use your best clinical judgment to weigh all information.

Consider developing and using a printed questionnaire to help residents and families contribute important information (e.g., Customary Routine).

Finally and most importantly, validate with the resident, through observations or interview, what you have heard from other facility staff, family members or what you have read in the record.

When collecting information from facility staff there are other important considerations that may make the process easier and more efficient.

You should respect the professional status of staff. Consider their need to perform their other duties in addition to providing necessary assessment information for you. The following suggestions may assist you when conducting facility staff interviews:

1. Post a schedule of residents who are being assessed during a given period (e.g., month) so that staff can prepare to participate in the assessment.
2. Provide prior notice to other staff members that an assessment is due, giving direct care staff an opportunity to gather their thoughts about residents. You may wish to provide a worksheet that staff (e.g., nursing assistants) could use to note particular resident information (e.g., ADLs).
3. Schedule interviews in advance, at mutually convenient times; avoid busy workload times.
4. Know what you want to cover. Leave a few minutes for staff to provide open-ended comments that may pertain to the well-being of the resident.
5. Provide other staff members with a list of areas you wish to cover to expedite the process.
6. Key your questions to the time period for which resident performance is being assessed.

You will often need to discuss a resident with more than one facility staff member. For example, an individual staff member who has been on a 3-week vacation may recall the resident's function a month ago instead of during the last 7 days. A nurse that floats from unit to unit may not know the residents well enough to respond appropriately. If a facility staff respondent struggles with answers or seems vague in referring to the time period in question, you should consider seeking another respondent.

Reinforce to all staff at the onset of the interview that you are gathering information to learn as much about the resident as possible to best plan for the resident's care. Reassure any staff that your purpose is the RAI process and not an evaluation of their job performance.

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