



In This Issue—

- The Basis of Good Advice p. 1
Start with the regulations
- Intermediaries' Advice p. 2
Don't assume it's correct
- Qualifying Criteria & OT p. 3
Dependent or just contingent?
- from the Lamp Room p. 3
by Diane Omdahl
- Validity of Advice p. 4
Look to the source
- LPN Orders and Notes p. 5
Signing, co-signing
- Question-of-the-Month's Answer p. 6
- HIPPS Code p. 7
Do not change it!
- Lawyer's Guidance on Supplies p. 8
The facts
- Need Advice? p. 8
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Good Advice Starts with Strong Regulatory Foundation

by Diane J. Omdahl, RN, MS

Advice: *an opinion or recommendation offered as a guide to action, conduct.*

Dr. Phil and *Dear Abby* are famous givers of advice on relationships. Steve Forbes and Suzy Orman are two of the many who advise on finances. And then, there is the cast of hundreds who provide advice on homecare regulations and compliance.

That cast, of course, includes Beacon Health and me. For more than 20 years, we have been providing guidance on compliance issues for Medicare-certified home health agencies. In response, we get feedback from our *Beacon Institute*TM members and subscribers, asking why we said something or for the source behind it. In many cases, we also get questions about other people's advice. *A director attends a seminar and hears something that doesn't make sense. She sends her concern to us. Or, an intermediary answers a question and an administrator challenges the validity of the answer.*

The one thing that we believe separates Beacon Health from many of the other advice-givers in homecare is this: connection to the source. In some cases, it is a rule or interpretation that forms the basis of the advice. Unfortunately, because the rules are not specific nor able to address every situation, many questions do not connect directly to a regulatory source. Then it's necessary to build a bridge from a credible source to the answer. Compliance in homecare is not a "one size fits all." A strong regulatory foundation is a must.

Because everyone can't know everything, they need help and seek advice. Misleading,

bad, or downright wrong advice, shared with us by *Beacon Institute* members, is the theme of this issue of *DIRECTION*. What can you do to protect yourself and ensure that you act only on good advice?

- Always ask the advisor for a source. Then check it out. If something is still unclear, ask more questions, dig deeper for information.
- Be wary of advice that is too brief. There are so many "ya buts" in home health care, it often takes more words to explain a correct approach.
- Follow the course that makes the most sense for you. And be prepared to explain or defend it if necessary.
- When the guidance is obviously flawed, I don't hesitate to tell providers to follow the advice of G. K. Chesterton, an English critic and poet. He would listen respectfully "and then go away and do the exact opposite." 🏠

Question of the Month: Supplies

From the following list, identify which supplies an agency must provide and the circumstances (that is, for use by the patient, staff, or both).

- a. An Unna boot for the therapy-only patient whose wife treats his chronic stasis ulcer
- b. Tube feeding supplies and formula for a post-stroke patient
- c. Incontinence briefs for a patient with Alzheimer's disease
- d. Wound filler paste for treatment of a pressure ulcer on the heel
- e. A hand splint for the arthritic patient
- f. Antibiotic ointment to treat several cuts the patient sustained in a fall

See page 6 for the answers.