



newsnotes

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2004

2003-- A Year of Change, Challenge...and Success!!



by Bill Mantzoukas, President

Merrimack Health Group is indeed experiencing a Happy New Year. MHG facilities faced a multitude of economic and administrative challenges in 2003, and yet, nearly every one of our 10 facilities achieved deficiency-free surveys! That is truly a testament to the hard work and dedication of every facility staff member at every level, and the MHG clinical consultants.

Throughout 2003 long-term care facilities across the country were faced with cutbacks and changes in funding that caused many to cease operations. Our facilities have been able to ride the waves of the funding challenges and

better plan the use of resources with the assistance and diligence of the MHG Central Office Team.

Now MHG begins a new year with a solid foundation, and the ability to focus on even greater challenges. In 2004 Merrimack Health Group and its facilities are embarking on a company-wide Customer Service Initiative.

What does this mean? Our Customer Service Initiative will be an evolving process of understanding and implementing best practices throughout our company and its facilities to improve and enhance the way in which we treat all of our customers--including each other. Our goal is to implement programs that can give us measurable results.

In November 2003, a Customer Service Committee was formed, whose members are: Erin Mondello, Rehabilitation Director, Gina Queiros, Webster Administrator, John

Kain, Senior Administrator, Karen Driscoll, MHG Communications Manager, George Barbuzzi, Lafayette Administrator, and myself. We met several times to begin the process of fact-finding and surveying to determine what companies provided exceptional customer service, what systems MHG and its facilities already had in place, and what could be improved. We shared some of these findings with the attendees of the recent MHG Kickoff February 5-6, where we learned how the hospitality industry seeks out every opportunity to "wow" the customer. We also learned that we have only scratched the surface.

In the coming weeks, you will be hearing more about our plans through your facility and this newsletter. As always, everyone's input is welcomed and expected. This is not a one month or even one year long project. If

approached and implemented correctly, our Customer Service Initiative could prove to be a 3 to 5 year project, and it will be ever-changing. MHG is prepared to make this commitment. I believe that it is imperative that we, as a "good" company on its way to becoming "great", make exceptional customer service as vital a component as every other aspect of our operations. Given the enthusiasm and drive of the MHG team, our administrators and their staff members, I am convinced that we will achieve success and enjoy ourselves along the way.

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Clinical Corner-Facilities Achieve Survey Success!



by *Kathy Pion, Clinical Consultant*

MHG facilities experienced a banner

year for survey completion. Seven facilities (including Hubbard Transitional Care Unit) were deficiency free in 2003, and three received only minor deficiencies. Given the sometimes challenging and painstaking survey process, these statistics are truly admirable and demonstrate the commitments of our clinical staff to quality care. Congratulations to all!

At our next Directors of Nursing Meeting, scheduled for Friday, March 26 at the Massachusetts Extended Care Federation in Newton Lower Falls, we will be introducing a new clinical benchmarking tool that will assist clinical staff in identifying issues and trends, and developing quick solutions.

FEDERATION SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

The Massachusetts Long Term Care Foundation is currently accepting applications for its 2004 scholarship awards.

Scholarships of up to \$2000 are available for people currently working full or part time at a nursing home or assisted living residence who have worked in long term care for at least one year, received above average evaluations from their supervisors and have been accepted or are enrolled in an accredited education program. Scholarship applications are due at the MECF offices no later than Friday, April 9, 2004. The MHG corporate office (781-631-5057) can send you an application, or call Nancy Sacon at MECF at 800-CARE-FOR for applications and for more information about the program.

New Faces in Facility Administration



Linda Gregoire, Director of Nursing

Webster Manor Healthcare Center welcomes Linda Gregoire as its new Director of Nursing. Linda received her nursing degree at Holyoke Community College and is certified in case management and rehabilitation nursing. For many years, Linda worked at an acute rehab hospital, and was also a school nurse. Prior to joining Webster Manor, Linda was the Director of Nursing for a Sunrise Assisted Living Facility.

The Oxford Rehabilitation and Nursing Care Center in Haverhill is pleased to welcome John Holt to MHG as its new administrator.

John brings more than 20 years of experience in long-term care administration throughout Massachusetts. John is a 1980 graduate of The University of Lowell with a Bachelors in Health Services Administration with an Associates Degree in Radiologic Technology from Northern Essex



John Holt, Administrator

Community College. Prior to joining the Oxford, John was the Administrator at Harborside Healthcare - Maplewood in Amesbury, MA.

WHY GREATNESS?

(an excerpt from author Jim Collins' book, Good to Great):

"What work makes you compelled to try to create greatness? ...When all the pieces come together, not only does your work move toward greatness, but so does your life. For, in the end, it is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work. Perhaps, then, you might gain that rare tranquility that comes from knowing that you've had a hand in creating something of intrinsic excellence that makes a contribution. Indeed, you might even gain that deepest of all satisfactions: knowing that your short time here on this earth has been well spent, and that it mattered."

Facility Feature--Craneville Place of Dalton

Craneville Place, located in Dalton, Massachusetts, is an 89 bed skilled nursing facility that offers programs that cater to the needs of the Berkshire community, including a short-term rehabilitation program, hospice care, traditional long-term care and a behavioral program for residents with dementia and/or an accompanying psychosis.

Craneville Place has experienced a high level of success over the past five years. This can be attributed to the fact that Craneville has put the bulk of its resources into its staff, through training, nurturing and promotion from within. There has been a tremendous amount of professional and personal growth at Craneville Place over the past few years. This is what makes the facility special and gives it an edge over its competitors.

In February, Craneville started what will be a major renovation to the building which includes everything from fixing inherited problems in areas such as electrical and generator work to upgrading the esthetics of the facility with all new furniture and interior design. The fact that Craneville Place has been able to exceed most, if not all, of its stated goals with a challenging physical environment (mostly 3-



The Staff at Craneville Place in Dalton, MA

Standing left to right: Joyce Wendling - Director of Dietary Services; Debbie Estes - Director of Nursing; Denise Whiteman - Unit 1 Senior CNA; Sue Giansiracusa - Director of Human Resources/AP; Joseph Passetto - MDS/MMQ/Medicare Coordinator; (back to the left) Sharon Bachand - Unit 2 Manager; Maria Casal - Unit 2 Senior CNA; Eileen Tobin - Staff Development Coordinator; Linda Michaels - Unit 1 Manager; Thelma Towne - Assistant Director of Nursing; Ann Koenig - Business Office Manager; Ann Shacar - Director of Environmental Services; Tricia Bragdon - Administrator; (kneeling back to the left) Sue Kellar - Director of Therapeutic Recreation; Tracy Spence - Senior Dietary Assistant; Christina Dupras - Director of Social Work; Patrick Shaw - Senior Housekeeping Assistant; Steve Lalinski - Senior Recreation Assistant; (left to right in the very front) Robin Knowles - Unit 3 Senior CNA; Terry Briggs - Unit 3 Manager. Missing in the picture: Lisa Battaini - Senior Laundry Assistant; Janet Kilty - Evening/Weekend Supervisor; Dot Carter - Weekend Supervisor; Peter Connors - Director of Admissions/Marketing; Doty Malumphy - Assistant to the DON in charge of Purchasing and Scheduling; Mary Sheline - Health Information Director/Purchasing Coordinator; Dan Douglas, Maintenance.

bed rooms, little parking, out-dated interior design, and little outdoor space) in a County where 70% of healthcare is dominated by Berkshire Health Systems (including the hospital) is a true testimony of how very special the people are who work at the facility.

Craneville has achieved five consecutive deficiency-free surveys from the Massachusetts Department of Public

Health and continues to have the highest nursing home rating in Berkshire County. This, combined with the high staffing levels and ability to retain good staff, has promoted Craneville's reputation in the community and increased its total number of referrals and admissions.

With the addition of Sugar Hill, the senior living community offering assisted living,

Craneville has been able to offer more alternatives to our consumers. It also provides another referral source for Craneville Place, which can offer its rehabilitation program to people residing at Sugar Hill and wanting to stay within its "continuum of care".

Business Office Corner



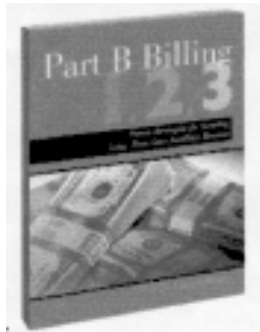
by Laura McDonnell,
Corporate Business Manager

CMS Mandates advance notice on Medicare Choice Residents

CMS has mandated effective 1/1/04 that facilities give a resident notice of impending non-coverage for all residents that are covered by Medicare-Managed Care coverage.

This applies to all Secure Horizons, First Seniority, Evercare and Blue Cross 65 patients. All administrators and business office managers were emailed a sample denial letter.

Laura McDonnell's Part B Billing Book Published



HcPro has recently published **Laura McDonnell's** amazing resource entitled : **Part B Billing 1,2,3-Proven**

Strategies for Securing Long-Term Care Ancillary Revenue.

This book is being lauded throughout the industry as providing step-by-step methods of billing for ancillaries that assists SNFs in managing the process to their advantage. Visit the HCPro website: www.hcmarketplace.com to see more about this terrific book!

Rehabilitation Corner-Therapy Caps Lifted



by Erin Mondello, OTR
Director of Rehabilitation

On December 8, 2003, President Bush signed the bill officially lifting the therapy caps

for two years. The \$1590 Medicare therapy cap on Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy/Speech Therapy had been in place since September 1, 2003. This two-year moratorium will protect beneficiaries in need of therapy services through 2005.

Prior to the date of implementation, Merrimack facilities instituted a tracking

system to monitor and determine the effect of the cap. Although it was only in place from September to early December, the effects were significant.

Several organizations, including The American Occupational Association and The American Physical Therapy Association continue to work on strategy for 2006.

John Kain Featured in Provider Magazine



John Kain, Senior
Administrator

John Kain, MHG Senior Administrator and Fairhaven Nursing Home in Lowell were

recently part of an article on employee surveys that was featured in the February 2004 issue of **Provider** magazine (page 43). In the article, John discussed how, by implementing employees and one-on-one coaching, Fairhaven was able to reduce CNA turnover dramatically at the facility. "By working closely with our supervisors, we were

able to reduce turnover and improve employee morale by focusing on issues that our staff identified as management problems in the survey results," he said. "The recommendations that came with the survey gave me a list of things to do that were immediate and easy to implement. The results came quickly," he added.



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