

## Demystifying Accreditation for Sleep Labs

The president of The Compliance Team seeks to demystify the accreditation process for sleep labs.

After meticulously building a solid reputation in the world of DME accreditation, Sandra Canally is determined to bring her simplified approach to sleep labs. As president of The Compliance Team Inc, based in Spring House, Pa, Canally has long worked on the premise that excellence in health care delivery is best achieved by dramatically simplifying quality standards.

In Fall 2006, The Compliance Team (TCT) got a chance to implement this philosophy in a big way when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) formally granted the company deemed status to accredit providers of all types of DME, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies (DMEPOS). Beyond the mandates that often accompany accreditation, Canally believes the entire process ultimately boosts patient care and improves business practices.

While TCT continues to actively accredit home care providers, these days company officials are also targeting sleep centers that may be looking for an alternative to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM). "I created the sleep center program quite a few years ago," says Canally, who launched the Exemplary Provider™ accreditation programs more than a decade ago. "I created it because DMEs were expanding and adding CPAP—and doing a lot of business with sleep labs."

With "deemed" status for DME now long established, Canally can accredit sleep labs that wish to "self dispense" CPAP units. "We can package the sleep lab and CPAP sales together and you are fully approved to bill Medicare," says Canally. "The major national sleep organization [AASM] is not able to do that because they are not CMS approved for DMEPOS."

Beyond the Medicare scenario, TCT can offer accreditation for sleep labs that encompasses all aspects of the lab's operations. "A big misconception is that the major national sleep organization is the only player, and the same thing can be said of hospitals when it comes to the Joint Commission," says Canally. "We provide an alternative that is not all about the minutia and jumping through hoops. We believe in simplification. We have led the movement within DME and other markets, and we are introducing these accreditation concepts for sleep centers. Simplification leads to clarity, and clarity allows the provider to focus on what matters most—safety, honesty, and caring."

These three principles are all part of what TCT officials call the "Exemplary Provider" brand. "The word 'exemplary' means you are setting yourself apart from other providers that are just doing the minimum," says Canally. "To accredit, you

need to score 90% or better. So already we are setting the bar higher as our minimum standard."

These days, TCT is opting to renew accreditation on a 3-year term, as opposed to the old 1-year process. During the 3-year span, providers still send in required items such as updated quality initiative plans, licensure documents, and proof of annual training.

In-person visits can be expected at least once during the 3 years, perhaps twice depending on the product lines. Second visits are focused only on patient care. "Since patients come in to a sleep lab in the evening, the sleep labs that we have accredited thus far have required night visits," says Canally. "For one company that had three locations, we went in during the evening and stayed through the night and into the morning to see the whole process."

With other sleep labs, TCT members have instead gone in extremely early in the morning. With this method, they could still see patients waking up and were able to ask questions about the night before, as well as take a peek at the sleep study. "We are not bound by Medicare to do unannounced visits on sleep labs," explains Canally. "Unlike us, the AASM puts their complete focus on the medical director and the sleep study itself—all the technical aspects."

"My belief, and this is at the foundation of our program, is that the full evaluation should encompass operational excellence," adds Canally. "Operational excellence leads to clinical excellence. You are not going to have the very best sleep study if you are not doing things right operationally—and that is the big difference between us and the AASM. We are looking at the whole picture of the organization, and they are looking at a small picture."

If providers, including sleep labs, do not want to get accredited, or don't need to do it for Medicare, there are other payors out there too. "A lot of the private pay organizations in managed care require accreditation to get on their network," says Canally, who still maintains her active RN license. "A lot of the state Medicaid organizations are going toward accreditation. It's just good business practice."

Accreditation usually takes between 3 and 4 months, and most of the time it is a relatively pain-free process. Canally attributes the lack of pain to simplified standards that are written in plain language. "Providers are more compliant because there are no surprises," says Canally. "We want their focus to be on improving operations and better serving patients."

---

Sandra Canally, R. N, B. S, President  
The Compliance Team, Spring House, PA  
[www.exemplaryprovider.com](http://www.exemplaryprovider.com)