

Marketing Matters



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One major misconception about Marketing efforts is that they're all "hit and miss." It's been often said that you waste half of every Marketing dollar you spend, but you can never tell which half! Surely enough Marketing dollars get wasted all the time, though mostly by those who engage in poor Marketing planning and execution. Marketing dollars don't have to be wasted at all, and it's actually within your power to make sure that you don't.

It's quite possible to ensure that all your efforts to make your Marketing activities more effective, to make sure you spend your Marketing dollars wisely, and to make better Marketing decisions have a much higher probability of success when those efforts are based on good, solid data. Why do we pay such close attention to patient and family satisfaction data? The main reason shouldn't be that we're required to collect and report it. Why do we care about employee satisfaction data? We shouldn't collect it just to show our staff that their opinion matters to someone. The primary reason for collecting any data at all should be that it can help us become better at what we do; it can make our organization a better provider of compassionate care, a better place to work, a better place to volunteer, and more. It's why the quality of the data (or the lack thereof) makes a big difference. The fact that the FEHC survey you most likely use has several weaknesses or the fact that you may neglect to collect satisfaction data from patients themselves (those who are in a position to provide it, at least) means the quantity and quality of data you use will not be what it could and ought to be. If you use some quick-and-easy, ready-to-use employee satisfaction survey you found in a book, you'll probably get what you paid for. It's often difficult to collect good, useful data that you can really use to make your hospice organization better. There are even companies that "specialize" in designing surveys for hospices, and at least some of their products are so very bad that selling them may be akin to robbing the client. But there's one kind of data that's both good and useful—not to mention easy to get.

Though my column has never before endorsed a hospice data provider, there's a first time for everything. The company is Hospice Analytics, out of Colorado Springs, CO., and it has the ability to provide some remarkably user-friendly and detailed reports—especially reports that shed light into your hospice area and your competition. For example (and it's a far-fetched one given my lack of clinical background), Moses Hospice can get a report on the number of hospice patients, days of care, and mean days per patient for Sinai County plus ten more surrounding counties of interest. My hospice can also get the number of patients, days of care, and mean days

per patient for each of the 15 hospices that serve those ten counties. I also want to know what the mean reimbursement per patient and mean LOS was for select hospices I'm directly competing with (or in surrounding or comparable areas). I'd like to know what percentage of those hospices' patients consisted of cancer vs. non-cancer patients, and what percentage of patients fell in the top 5 diagnosis categories. I want information on what percentage of each hospice's patients received continuous home care, respite care, etc. I'm curious about my competitors' patient status at discharge, their patient demographics by age, gender, and race, and what those numbers look like in comparison to my own. I have a long list of other things I'd like to know that would make this example too long, but this is just the tip of the iceberg of what I can expect to get from Hospice Analytics. In fact, Hospice Analytics is not merely able to give me a broad range of very valuable information, but more importantly it's able to give me information that I can really trust.

Cordt Kassner, the Founder of Hospice Analytics, was the CEO of the Colorado State Organization of Hospices for seven years, so he knows hospice inside and out. He's one of those rare people who don't cringe when someone asks "Do we need to know the numbers?" And I think Cordt's passion for data can become your good fortune. If you're wondering how long I've been on Cordt's Christmas list, I should say outright that I've met him just once, when he attended one of my presentations, and I've never had a business relationship with him. In short, whether you use the services of Hospice Analytics or not makes no personal (let alone financial) difference to me—but I believe it will make a real difference for your hospice. The cost is surprisingly reasonable too, making this an even easier decision.

If you've seen *Slumdog Millionaire*, maybe you can imagine having the good fortune of getting to the million-dollar question on a game show that can change your life. If you didn't know the answer to that last critical question, and had to choose between using some still-available lifelines and going it alone, would you forego the help and opt to take a random guess instead—with so much at stake? Of course not; you'd use every bit of help available in order to increase your chances of making the right choice. Well, thanks to Hospice Analytics you now have at your disposal current, relevant, highly diagnostic data that can allow you to better understand your competitors and the patients they serve; why on earth would you not take advantage?

The HOPE of Wisconsin can actually provide you with data from Hospice Analytics; even data about hospices in neighboring (or other) States. Simply email or call the HOPE office for more information on what is available and the cost. Every penny spent in getting this data will be recovered through savings resulting from more targeted, better-focused Marketing activities. You'll be making Marketing decisions based on more information and less guesswork, and you'll be able to not only deal with present competitive challenges more effectively, but also better anticipate and take on future challenges. Times are tough enough as it is; hospice and palliative care organizations that become more proactive about making data-driven Marketing decisions, however, will always end up ahead.

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