Guess Which Community Has the Shortest Call Response Times in the Industry?

By Susan Saldibar

One of the top issues in skilled nursing and long term care is the concern over neglect. So, we have these nasty images of older residents lying in bed too long, lying in a wet bed, lying on the floor after a fall. Images of buttons being frantically pressed to no avail.

"I was surprised to read that are no industry standards for resident call system response times."

In a 2015 article, Jacquie Brenan, Vice President of [Vigil Health Solutions](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner), floated the idea that benchmarking of call response times might benefit senior living communities. She got a few comments, each of which expressed enthusiasm for the idea. One responder even thought standards already existed and was "surprised to read that there are no industry standards" for call system response times.

That got me pawing through dozens of Google search pages for more information on call response times. I found promotions, but nothing about best practices. Could it be that families just assume that the staff will respond quickly when their loved ones call? I doubt it.

Can you create a call response time standard? Would it be beneficial or not?

I asked Jacquie if a) it was possible to create a standard and b) how it would benefit communities and the industry, as a whole.

Jacquie mentioned a call response time study Vigil did with 500 communities. "We recorded an average response time of 8 minutes, for calls that are not related to system supervision," Jacquie told me. "The top 10% of sites averaged a 2-minute response time." That's pretty good. Do you know how your call response time stacks up?

But there are other factors that may make it harder to calculate actual response time, Jacquie acknowledged. Those factors include staffing shortages, unmanageable call volume, and high acuity levels of residents.

"And, often, staff, in their effort to assist the resident, forget to cancel the call," says Jacquie. "This can quickly skew response time results as well," she added.

So creating a standard requires a big picture approach. But how might a standard improve and benefit senior living?

Can a community promote their response times?

Jacquie mentioned that they have uncovered other studies that indicate a slight decrease in the number of falls associated with faster call system response times. If that's true, that would, no doubt, be of interest to prospective residents and their families.

Of course, if a standard was created of, say, 8 minutes, would it make sense for CMS to make it a requirement for skilled nursing and long term care communities? Or are there too many other factors to consider? Time may tell, according to Jacquie. "It's important for operators to realize the power of call system data and use it to track their own response times," she says. "But, until there are some accepted best practices, it will be hard to really use response time competitively," she added.

So, which community has the shortest call alert response time?

I'm certainly not advocating to heap more regulations on long term care and skilled nursing. One could argue we have plenty as is. Maybe, in some cases, too many. But the stories of neglect continue. And, yes, in many cases it's a training issue, a burn-out issue and so on.

But, as a target demographic (baby boomer, adult child of older parent) call response time would be high on my list of questions for a senior living community. And, as for providing a competitive advantage, consider the potential impact of this tagline: "We have the shortest response times in the industry."

Which brings us back to the title of this piece, "Which community has the shortest call alert response time?" Without standards, it's a hard question to answer. But it may only be a matter of time before the industry gets serious about measuring it. Then, someone will certainly claim the tagline.