

# upfront

HEALTHCARE

Quarterly for LTC Professionals

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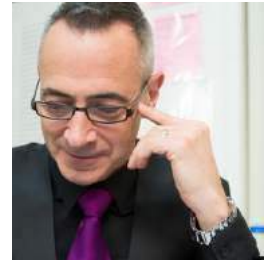
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The people who are crazy enough  
to think they can change the world  
are the ones who do.

-Steve Jobs

Genius is the ability to reduce the  
complicated to the simple.

-C W Ceran



This issue's cover story is about compliance. We are an industry that is more regulated than most. There are rules for everything. It is to a point where compliance can make things complicated. But we have to do everything in our power as a pharmacy vendor to assist our facilities in maintaining order and of course regulations.

However, I propose that there is a simpler approach. What if compliance and the regulations that surrounded it, **were simplified to just "doing the right thing?"** There is a word that embodies both of our professions, as well as the majority of businesses: service.

Good business as well as being successful in general, is a factor of this service. The more we think of others before ourselves, the more successful we will become. It needs to be a selfless service. This means giving without any expectation of return.

This is not about my business against yours. It is not about position in the company or industry. It is doing the right thing when it comes to someone else's needs.

We all have labels for ourselves, don't we? We are husband or wife, daddy or daughter, owner, CEO, COO or VP. **But isn't that limiting in what we are capable of?** And why let more rules or labels get in the way as to what we are put on this earth for?

**My name is Joe.** And I along with the two great gentlemen who own this company, Specialty RX, are here to do the best we simply know how to do, be the best selves that we can be and offer you the best service we personally can.

To me that is simply genius. And crazy enough to think we can change the complexion of compliance.

**God bless you!**

**Joe Kubulak**

V.P. of Operations and Business  
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# GET CLEAR ON COMPLIANCE.

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BY JOAN THARP

Rigorous attention to policies, procedures and systems for ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations is crucial for success, let alone survival, in an industry constantly under scrutiny.

Who can possibly keep up with the rules and regulations covering the long-term care (LTC) industry today?

**The answer is simple:** The LTC business that wants to be around tomorrow.

There is no question that trying to fully comply with state and federal regulations over services and residents' care feels like walking through a minefield.

It's easy, and, frankly, common, for an LTC facility to inadvertently misstep. We're not talking malfeasance; we're talking innocent mistakes. Sometimes it comes from not knowing that a regulation has changed or a

new one has been added. Sometimes it's because you misinterpreted a regulation. (They aren't always black and white.)

Here's one example. Did you know that among the regulatory changes in the November 2017 updated guidelines from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) is one that shifts your responsibility to ensure residents get eyeglasses and hearing aids? According to interpretive guidance on this change, you no longer are responsible for providing these devices. You still need to help provide these services and secure payment for them, and transport residents to medical appointments. But it's no longer up to you to make sure individuals get



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these aids.

Now, as a practical matter, you're going to continue doing what you've always done: provide eye exams and hearing tests, and make sure your residents get the devices they need, because you want your residents to have a high level of functioning, independence and safety.

But in the odd regulatory world LTC facilities operate in, it's entirely possible that this small change may cause regulators to pay even more attention to, and beef up enforcement of, vision and hearing services you provide – just to make sure you are complying with the latest regulatory tweak.

There were big changes to the pharmacy services portion of the CMS guidelines last fall, too. There is more emphasis on ensuring patient care is individualized, and that medications are prescribed and administered appropriately. For example, in the case of psychotropics, you must first try behavioral intervention. If that doesn't work and you turn to medication, you must have a plan to gradually reduce the dosage and you cannot renew the order after 14 days.

**COMPLIANCE:  
NOT AN OPTION**

Often, something slips through the cracks during the Herculean effort to provide great care

to residents who have many and often complex needs while keeping the facility running well 24/7. It's understandable. But it's no defense. You can't negotiate an F-Tag. You either stay on top of regulations, and adjust your policies, practices and procedures, or you potentially risk it all. You could lose your reputation and competitiveness. You could be denied reimbursement. You could face criminal charges and hefty fines and financial penalties. You could even be expelled from Medicare and Medicaid entirely.

So, what's a well-meaning, well-run LTC facility to do?

Make compliance part of your culture, says Usher Eisen, CEO and founder of Visualize Healthcare of Brooklyn, New York.

Visualize Healthcare provides comprehensive on-site optometry services to residents in LTC facilities in New York state. (It plans to expand into neighboring states.)

Mr. Eisen offers this advice on how to build and maintain a culture of compliance:

- Develop visible and clear compliance programs that include strong support for

ongoing staff education

- Define and delegate responsibilities for compliance
- Keep policies and procedures up to date and easy for staff to understand
- Recognize that past practices won't ensure compliance. It's a new day and it calls for an aggressive approach to validate compliance in every corner of your operation.
- Partner with vendors and healthcare providers who understand and embrace compliance throughout their organizations. Ask them how strong their compliance programs are, and how they will strengthen your services and operation.

Saba Ansari, director of compliance for SpecialtyRx, agrees that making compliance second nature is essential for the health of patients and residents, and the business. SpecialtyRx, based in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, is a full-service pharmacy provider for subacute and LTC facilities in the United States.

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**“Trying to comply with state & federal regulations feels like walking through a minefield.”**

## COMPLIANCE RESOURCES

These websites have great tools and information on compliance:

**American Health Care Association** (includes links to its state associations)

→ [www.ahcancal.org](http://www.ahcancal.org)

**American Society of Consultant Pharmacists**

→ [www.ascp.com](http://www.ascp.com)

**Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)**

→ [www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov)

CMS website for information on the State Operations Manual, including a link to download the manual

<https://cmscompliancegroup.com/tag/state-operations-manual/>

**National Association of Long Term Care Administrative Boards**

→ [www.nabweb.org](http://www.nabweb.org)

**Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

→ [www.oig.hhs.gov](http://www.oig.hhs.gov)

**Office of the Medicaid Inspector General, New York State**

→ [www.omig.ny.gov](http://www.omig.ny.gov)

She advises facilities to have regularly scheduled compliance meetings to identify potential issues, and to conduct internal audits of the daily workflow, using the state operations manual as your guide. “Do what the CMS surveyor would do. Look at what they look at,” she suggests. “For example, observe how your staff administers medications. Look at the carts and see if there are any expired medications.”

“You don’t need to run through everything in the manual. Just focus on what have been issues or that you think might be,” she adds.

Both Mr. Eisen and Ms. Ansari recommend turning to consultants for help where you need it. Long-term care consultants can help with audits and development as well as staff training and education. Look for consultants that know your state regulations as well as federal. Pharmacy consultants have experience with survey requirements, especially the recent updates to guidelines on pharmacy services. They can help keep medication carts in proper order.

Niche consultants such as Visualize Healthcare and SpecialtyRx have experience with survey requirements, especially the recent updates to guidelines. They also offer tracking and reporting services that ensure you are on top of each patient and resident’s care and will flag potential compliance issues.

For example, Visualize Healthcare’s Accutrack scheduling software tracks and reports on residents’ eyecare appointments and services so that you know who was seen when and for what, the outcome of the appointment, and the schedule for follow-up appointments. Facilities can get an overview of vision services for every resident, going back 10 years via email or phone.

Mr. Eisen says one of the most common compliance-related problems when it comes to eyecare in LTC facilities is a lack of follow up on the optometrist’s recommendations. “It happens because staff is buried in work, not because they don’t care. Most facilities just don’t have the resources or staff to catch every follow up, and most don’t have a tracking system, other than a manual one,” he explains.

If follow up is not timely, you are out of compliance, he notes, and you could be cited by the state during its next survey, under the broader care requirements.



SpecialtyRx also helps clients from drifting into noncompliance. It offers custom reports that identify potential problems, pulling from its database of patient profiles and medication orders. For example, it can run a list of all residents receiving antibiotics or anti-psychotic medication, including how long they have been on them, and highlight any conflict with what current regulations say is the correct use and number of days usage.

#### **A REAL-WORLD VIEW OF LTC**

Mr. Eisen understands the pressure and the fishbowl environment in which LTC providers operate. That comes from

having worked in the healthcare industry all his professional life and coming from a family that operates LTC facilities.

“I’m passionate about good care. If you do something, do it right, especially when it comes to the elderly, the sick and the frail. I’ve walked the hallways of hundreds of facilities throughout the state, I’ve seen what it’s like for administrators, staff and residents,” he says.

Mr. Eisen also clearly sees the environment in which LTC facilities, and other healthcare providers, operate.

“There are so many ways we can

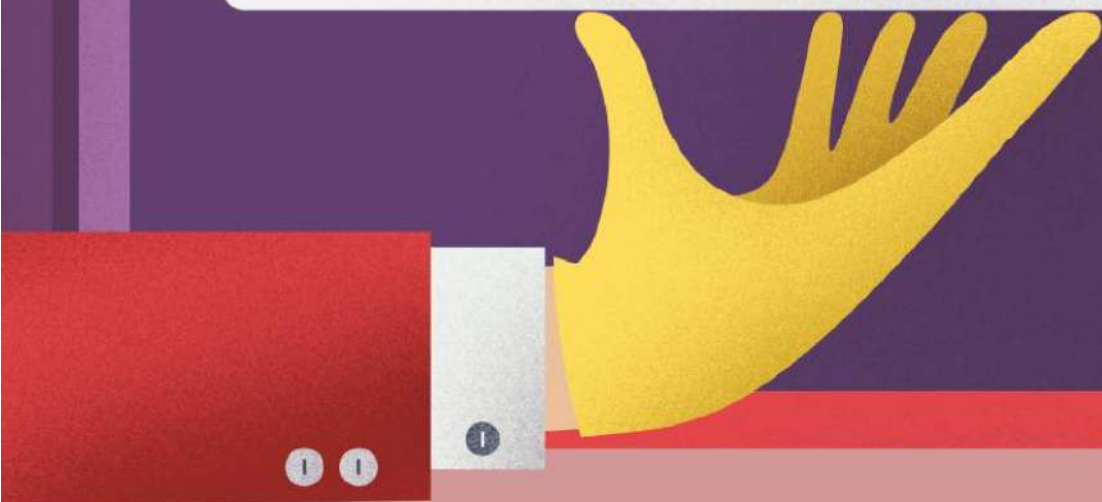
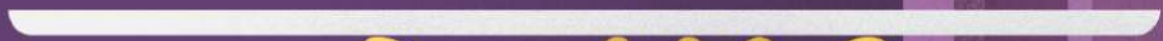
get ‘caught’ if we make any misstep, unintended or otherwise. The pressure is tremendous, and the consequences of noncompliance are severe,” he says.

Mr. Eisen notes that federal spending on oversight of the LTC industry has increased significantly. Over the past 10 years, more than \$2.1 billion has been spent to investigate and litigate violations.

“Noncompliance can knock you out, even if you are providing great care. That’s the reality in healthcare today. So, make sure internally you’re on top of it, and partner with those who know compliance is critical to your future,” he says. ●



# TAKING CUSTOMER SERVICE TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL



The Grand Healthcare  
System offers a hotel-like  
concierge service as part of  
its devotion to providing the  
best in customer service.

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BY JOAN THARP



The Grand Healthcare System, a New York regional healthcare provider, positions itself as a luxury facility for rehabilitation and recovery. It takes great pride in offering excellent and seamless customer service, which includes a concierge service at each of its 14 facilities. Just as you find at a hotel, the concierge service at The Grand strives to meet every need of its residents (or guests, as they are known) to make the stay as comfortable as possible.

Jay Lawrence, director of business development for The Grand, is charged with overseeing the entire customer experience. Upfront Healthcare asked him how the concierge service works, why it matters and what tips he has for improving customer service.

**Concierge services are staples in the hotel industry but fairly new in the LTC industry. Why did you launch this service?**

As a brand, we consider ourselves top shelf. We want to lead in everything we offer.

We want to provide a ubiquitous and consistent customer experience, and the concierge service is part of that. It fits with who we are and it's a way to differentiate ourselves.

Concierge services are growing, not just within LTC facilities. I recently read an article that talks about the increase in companies

specializing in offering these services, such as private home services to help people in their daily lives.

In addition, increasingly the public expects and appreciates attention to the customer experience – whether in restaurants, online ordering, or nursing homes.

Consumer expectations about technology are also changing. Baby Boomers are generally comfortable with technology. It's part of their lives. As that group starts to age and has more need for medical services such as rehab, they come to places like ours expecting access to technology like iPads and applications like Skype. So we offer these services.

As the world changes around us, we want to be in lockstep with people's expectations because superior customer service is paramount to our brand.

**How does the concierge service work? What do you offer your guests?**

The service is spearheaded by an individual, a concierge, at each facility but it's really a team effort. The concierge is the point person who navigates the internal process for the guest and pulls in others where they are needed. The goal is to make sure every guest is comfortable right from the moment they come through our doors. They should never feel like they're alone or lost.

They should always feel like they have a pair of hands ready to help them.

When the guest arrives, the concierge makes sure everything on the checklist gets done. Did the guest receive a gift bag? Were all introductions to staff made? Are all the necessary items in the guest's room? Do they have their schedule and a calendar of events? Do they understand how to operate the TV and the iPad? Do they have any special culinary preferences? Are their meetings we need to set up for them?

Later in the day, the concierge comes back to see if the guest has any questions, and to make sure that any scheduled visits by doctors or staff happened and in a timely manner.

**Tell me more about how your guests benefit from this added level of service. How does it help them?**

People often come to us after being in a hospital, where it often is difficult to get someone to stop for a second and talk to you about what's next. It's usually hard to navigate the hospital process. We did not want to in any way mirror that confusion and tension. We know our guests will have some level of stress or anxiety when they arrive – it's natural – and we want from the start to make it easier for them.

Knowing that there is someone



“I think businesses in general often forget the importance of listening.”

here quarterbacking their experience is a real delight for our guests. That there is one person who is the point person for their every need. They're embraced by us, figuratively and literally, as soon as they arrive.

We want to get our guests through our system effortlessly, get them better, and, if possible, get them home and back into the community as quickly as possible.

### Are there benefits for staff, too?

I think they're proud to be part of an organization that holds

customer service in high esteem and takes it to this level. And they know their input really matters. A lot of what we do is to judge on the fly what each guest needs and will make them more comfortable. The staff's conversations with guests and their families are crucial to understanding this.

### What lessons are here for other LTC facilities?

In our industry it's so easy to get caught up in the daily tasks and paperwork, and forget that the folks that come through our doors are

why we exist. They need to be taken care of in a way that reflects what it means to be in healthcare, to be charged with taking care of a person at that moment in time, to have that life in your hands, until they are ready to go on to the next step.

I think businesses in general often forget the importance of listening, communicating, and providing great customer service. Take the time to hear what people are saying and recalibrate what you're doing so that you truly are meeting each person's needs. It will take you a long way toward success. ●



## ALEXA, WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

### The New Jewish Home in New York City is experimenting with a virtual concierge.

Called "Connect the Dots", it is a voice-enabled concierge service based on Amazon's Echo Show smart speaker and display, and its Alexa virtual assistant. Residents can ask the system to contact staff, find out about amenities and services, and play music, games and news. In addition, residents can call up historical audio clips.

"Connect the Dots" was developed by Brooklyn-based Soundmind.

The system currently is in place at the company's Sarah Neuman campus in Westchester. It is

available to residents at no charge.

Residents' families can plug in, too. If they have an Amazon Alexa virtual assistant device at home, they can ask it for information about their family member at the New Jewish Home, such as upcoming doctor appointments.

It's a bonus for staff, too. Staff at several of the Neuman campus use the system to keep residents entertained while their meals are being prepared.

The New Jewish Home serves 12,000 older adults in their homes, on campuses, and in senior housing complexes in New York City, with services in rehabilitation, long-term care, senior housing and home health.



# Go Boldly Beyond Bingo

Residents thrive best when you match activities to their interests and age group, and offer lots of variety.

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BY JOAN THARP

Painting. Board games. Movie night. Fitness class. Musical performances. Flower arranging. Challah baking. Ice cream socials. Religious services. A visit from a mini horse. These are just some of the activities residents can participate in during a typical week at the 510-bed Boro Park Center for Rehabilitation and Healthcare in Brooklyn, New York.

And at Brooklyn's 200-bed Sheepshead Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, residents can choose from a wide range of activities, including yoga, a visit from a therapy dog, and community-wide art projects that entice everyone to participate.

What, no bingo? Yes, there's bingo. But both facilities go far beyond the traditional bingo and birthday parties. Each use a person-centered approach to designing recreational activities, just as they do with all the services and care they provide. They take the time to understand the interests and activities of residents before they entered the facility, and find ways to incorporate, if not replicate, them.

Plenty of studies confirm the importance of providing many and diverse activities at LTC facilities. Done thoughtfully and with the individual in mind, you can provide residents with meaning, pleasure, more competence and better social connection.

Rachel Klein, recreation director at Boro Park Center, says she strives to make it feel like home. "When it feels more like home, your residents feel better. You help do that by understanding and offering activities that really reflect their interests and lives before they came to your facility," she comments. "

Sound tough to do? Think you don't have the budget? It's often not a lack of resources that prevents a facility from offering a rich program of activities, but a lack of information and understanding about residents and what they like to do. (And sometimes you must reignite the creative spark.)

At Sheepshead, Christine Gorman, director of therapeutic recreation, and her staff like to combine activities to make the experience much richer and more meaningful. She mentions Charlotte, an 86-year-old resident, who enjoys yoga and art. Staff blended those interests to create an art therapy for Charlotte that begins and ends with a meditation, as is the practice in yoga classes. Charlotte loves it.

#### **VARIETY: THAT SPICE OF LIFE**

Shake it up, Ms. Klein says. Be creative. "Don't keep doing what you've always done. Some facilities' activities haven't changed in years: it's bingo, bingo, bingo. Today's

65-year-old isn't always interested in bingo. Or crochet. They like paint nights, jewelry making, ceramics and up-and-coming crafts," she says.

Boro Park Center's activities are so popular that many former residents come back just to join in the fun." They ask me, 'When's Music with Michael?'" she says with a laugh.

Both facilities

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are meticulous about getting feedback from residents after they participate in an activity. That's how Ms. Klein found out, to her surprise, that many at Boro Park Center prefer exuberant Zumba (a dance fitness program) over sedate yoga. At Sheepshead, recreation staff check in with residents twice a day. If a resident has stopped attending an activity, they try to find out why. "Sometimes you'll find out that they stopped going to bowling because they are feeling less flexible. Then you can adjust their therapy to make it easier for them to do what they had been enjoying," she comments.

Ms. Gorman also encourages her staff to come up with ideas on how to make an event more interesting and engaging. After each event she asks them how it could be improved.

### **TUNE IN TO CULTURAL PREFERENCES**

Boro Park Center originally was built to serve the local Jewish community and it still does. Activities reflect that: there are weekly Shabbat services and regular talks by a rabbi. In addition, there is a Shul (synagogue) on site.

It also offers Christian services. A growing population of Chinese residents in the neighborhood prompted Boro Park Center to dedicate two floors to serve this community. Activities tap into their cultural practices and interests: tai chi, calligraphy, mahjong, origami and Chinese opera. Chinese-speaking staff interpret for any activities led by staff who don't speak Chinese.

"It's important to offer activities

that are meaningful to each culture," says Ms. Klein. "It's part of making it feel like home. We educate ourselves on all of the cultures represented in our facility to determine what activities are appropriate for each culture and age group."

Sheepshead, too, offers Jewish religious services as well as Christian.

### **THINK ENGAGEMENT, NOT DISTRACTION**

"We believe strongly in using different tools and modalities for creative expression to meet client's needs, improve their self-esteem and self-expression, and increase their quality of life," says Ms. Gorman "People want to feel good, to grow, to learn new things, no matter who they are or where they are." ●