

Physical Environment Issues Continue to Top Citation Lists

Appropriate responses, policies lead to improved survey results

Client

An 80-bed hospital located an hour outside a major southwest metropolitan area. Due to its small size and limited onsite staff and expertise, the hospital sought Greeley's assistance following its triennial Joint Commission survey.

Background & Challenges

During its Joint Commission survey, the hospital was cited for a number of Environment of Care and Emergency Management issues. The issue of most significance, which caused the condition level finding, was the inappropriate management of air pressure in the surgical services environment, inclusive of sterile processing. The triennial survey was to be followed by an Evidence of Standards Compliance (ESC) survey, during which The Joint Commission would validate that the client had implemented the corrective actions as they said they would.

Greeley Findings & Solutions

Greeley conducted an intensive re-survey of the physical environment to assess if the client had fully implemented its corrective actions and to determine if there were any other areas of non-compliance.

Greeley found that the client was not on target for the corrective actions it had submitted to The Joint Commission. In some instances, the hospital wasn't operationalizing the action plans to which it had committed. In other cases, it had overcompensated for the citations by going above and beyond the standards requirements.

"The hospital had committed to doing things on a daily basis that it failed to implement almost from the get-go," said the consultant. "Several of their action plans were overly complex and more onerous than necessary."

Greeley helped the organization develop methods for addressing citations that directly dealt with the issue in an appropriate manner—without creating undue burdens on the hospital.

A case of “overcompliance”—checking air pressure in the operating rooms

The most significant survey finding involved checking the air pressure in the operating rooms. The hospital performed surgeries only four days out of seven each week, but when it submitted its Evidence of Standards Compliance, the hospital committed to checking the pressure in all the operating rooms every day—a commitment for which it did not have adequate staffing levels to accomplish.

The Joint Commission standards do not specify a frequency for checking air pressure relationships, so an appropriate response would be to commit to check the pressure every day the hospital performs surgical cases. “If nothing is scheduled in the operating rooms, there’s no need to check air pressure,” said the consultant. It is, however, very important to establish a process for managing that environmental condition if you have to do emergency surgery, say, on a weekend or holiday.

Fire Alarm Testing Documentation

The triennial survey findings identified that the hospital needed an attestation that it was fully compliant with fire alarm testing—an area that continues to be a top-cited Joint Commission standard. Several of the survey findings related to whether all of the applicable fire alarm devices had been tested during the past 12 months. But the hospital was not able to produce a document that Greeley was comfortable could be presented to a Joint Commission surveyor to successfully demonstrate compliance.

It turned out that this was not a compliance issue in terms of actually testing the fire alarms, but a communications issue between the facilities manager and the vendor. “The number of fire alarm devices and the number recorded as tested were not consistent,” said the Greeley consultant.

To rectify the situation, Greeley met face-to-face with the vendor to explain the organization’s needs and the deficiencies in the vendor’s documentation.

Because of the value provided with its first site, the hospital system subsequently requested that Greeley work with its other sites prior to their upcoming surveys to proactively resolve issues, rather than react to citations and findings post-survey. As a result, another hospital within the system that used the same fire alarm testing vendor and had the potential for similar issues during its pending survey benefitted from Greeley’s work with the first hospital.

“I knew what the issues were at the first hospital and was able to identify the same practices in the second organization because it had the same testing vendor, the same documentation issues, and the same inconsistencies,” said the consultant. “Since I’d already had the conversation with the vendor, he knew the expectations in terms of deliverables for both hospitals.”

“We have no reason to believe the focus on the physical environment standards is going to go away any time soon, because The Joint Commission keeps finding issues,” said the consultant. “We continuously build on our experiences working with hospitals to implement efficient and effective corrective actions to the high-risk and frequently cited issues.”

ABOUT GREELEY

The Greeley Company

Headquartered in the greater Boston area, The Greeley Company serves administrative and clinical teams in more than 500 healthcare organizations nationwide each year—ranging from the largest healthcare systems and academic medical centers to critical access rural hospitals. We have a rich history of providing innovative consulting, education, outsourcing solutions, interim staffing, and external peer review to healthcare organizations nationwide. Greeley focuses on contemporary needs and challenges related to medical staff optimization & physician alignment; accreditation, regulatory compliance & quality; and credentialing & privileging.

Our mission

The Greeley Company’s mission is to help healthcare organizations improve efficiency, comply with regulations and standards, achieve practitioner engagement and alignment, and excel in delivering high-quality, cost-effective patient care.

Our clients

Our clients include healthcare organizations of all sizes and types—from large, multi-setting healthcare systems and academic medical centers to critical access rural hospitals. We work with clinical and administrative individuals and teams across the entire organization including physicians, executives, directors, managers, and frontline staff.

Our advisors and staff

The Greeley Company provides our clients with a dedicated team of advisors who bring valuable experience and rich backgrounds as former hospital, nurse, and physician executives, as former “Big 4” consultants, and as former regulatory surveyors. Our professionals understand your pain and provide the breadth and depth of preparation, training, and education needed to drive success. Behind our advisors stand talented management and support staff committed to ensuring the highest level of customized attention and client fulfillment.

Contact us

Please contact us at 888/749-3054 or info@greeley.com for more information on how The Greeley Company can help you meet your challenges and goals.