

# Home Health Aides & State Surveys

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## THE STRAIGHT STORY ABOUT STATE SURVEYS:

There are certain rules that every Medicare agency must follow. Many of these are federal rules that are written in the Conditions of Participation (COP). Home health aide services are so important that following the rules for aide services is one of these Conditions. Besides the Conditions, the agency must follow the rules of the state in which it provides services. Finally, an agency must follow its own rules — in other words its own policies and procedures. To make sure that homecare agencies are following the rules and providing safe care, the government conducts a survey on a regular basis. The survey is usually called the “State Survey.”

How often a survey occurs depends on several things, but the two most important are (1) what problems were found on the previous survey, and (2) whether there have been any complaints against the agency by patients and/or family members. The survey is done at least every three years, and often every year. A survey may be done at any time to investigate a complaint. Regardless of the reason, the process is the same.

One very important part of the survey is to look at home health aide services. There are three methods the surveyor will use to evaluate home health aide services.

» Review of clinical records

The surveyors will select clinical records and read the aide notes on those patients. They will compare what was checked or written to the care plans or assignment sheets that the aides were supposed to follow. They will also check to see whether the aides reported any problems they found.

» Review of employee files

The surveyor may look at your employee file during the survey. He or she will check whether you were properly trained or certified before you were hired. The surveyor will check to make certain that you completed at least 12 hours of in-service training during each 12-month period and that you passed a performance review during the last 12 months.

» Home visits and interviews

The surveyor will make home visits with aides to observe the care they provide and to talk with the aides and their patients.

At the end of the survey, the surveyor will give the agency a written notice of any of the rules it is not following. The agency will then present a plan to correct the problems. The surveyor will make another visit to verify that the plan did correct the problems. It is very serious for the agency if the problems are not corrected.

## SOME WAYS TO HELP YOUR AGENCY:

- » Attend the required in-services.
- » Check your paperwork carefully against the care plan or assignment sheet, and turn it in on time.
- » Report any problems with the patient to the nurse or therapist.
- » Follow any instructions given as part of a plan to correct problems after a survey.
- » If the surveyor visits your patient, be pleasant and do your job as usual.

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## CASE STUDY: THE SURVEYOR VISITS MARIA'S PATIENT

Maria has just been informed that the state surveyor will make a home visit with her tomorrow when she visits Mr. Baker. Here are some important things for Maria to keep in mind.

Arrive on time, neatly dressed according to the agency dress code. Do not go into the house until the surveyor arrives. (If the surveyor is late, know when to call the agency.) When the surveyor arrives, introduce yourself and then introduce the surveyor to Mr. Baker. (He already knows about the survey visit.)

Carefully review the care plan/assignment sheet, even if you have been visiting Mr. Baker for many months.

Follow all agency policies as you provide care, particularly:

- » Pay careful attention to infection control. Wash your hands appropriately and wear gloves, aprons, etc., when needed. Clean equipment carefully.
- » Protect Mr. Baker's privacy. Make certain that he is properly draped and covered.
- » Promote Mr. Baker's rights. Carefully explain to him what you are doing and how he can assist in his care. Give him a choice as to clothing, etc., if appropriate. Show respect in treating his property with care.
- » Protect other patients' rights by not talking about them with Mr. Baker.
- » Call the office if there is something that needs to be reported to the nurse.
- » Use good body mechanics.
- » Complete your documentation while reviewing the care plan/assignment sheet.
- » Leave the patient tidy and comfortable, with items within easy reach.

The surveyor may ask you questions about the care. Make sure you understand what the question is, and don't be afraid to ask the surveyor if you don't understand what he or she means. It is usually better to answer what is asked and not "chatter" on and on.

The surveyor may stay after the visit is over, to talk with Mr. Baker. This is normal, so don't be worried if you leave before he or she does.

You will always feel a little nervous during a survey visit. Plan what you will do, and organize your work. Take your time and do a good job. Smile. This visit should not be different from all the other times you have seen Mr. Baker. Relax, you will do fine!

## SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Imagine that the surveyor saw your last visit. Are there any things you should have done that you didn't do? Or did you do things you should not have done? On a sheet of paper, list some of the parts of the visit that may have been a problem if the surveyor had been watching. List how you will change those things on your next visit. If you do not think there were any concerns, then list the ways you followed agency policies during the visit.

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DIRECTIONS: READ EACH QUESTION CAREFULLY. THEN, DETERMINE THE BEST ANSWER. CHECK THE CORRESPONDING BOX ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET. DO NOT WRITE ON THIS POST-TEST.

1. What federal rules about homecare will the surveyor evaluate?
  - a. The Conditions of Participation
  - b. The Limits on Liability
  - c. The Civil Rights Act
  - d. Equal Opportunity Employer
  
2. What other rules come into play during a survey?
  - a. Federal rules
  - b. State rules
  - c. Agency policies and procedures
  - d. All of the above
  
3. Which of the following is NOT a way that surveyors look at home health aide services?
  - a. Reviewing clinical records
  - b. Videotaping home visits
  - c. Making home visits to patients
  - d. Reviewing employee files
  
4. A survey may be done to investigate a complaint made by a patient.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. During a home visit, the surveyor asks you a question that you do not really understand. What should you do?
  - a. Answer the question since it would be rude to ask her to repeat it.
  - b. Say you are not allowed to answer any questions.
  - c. Tell the surveyor you are not sure exactly what she meant and ask her to clarify the question.
  - d. Respond that you just don't know.
  
6. What should you do if a surveyor is going to observe your visit?
  - a. Review the care plan/assignment sheet at the beginning of the visit.
  - b. Share stories with the surveyor and patient about other patients.
  - c. Go into the home first to get everything ready before the surveyor comes.
  - d. Ask the surveyor to tell you if you do anything wrong.
  
7. A survey is done at least every ten years.
  - a. True
  - b. False

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8. What does the surveyor look for in home health aide employee files?
- a. Training and certification
  - b. In-service attendance
  - c. Performance review
  - d. All of the above
9. What is one reason that the surveyor reads home health aide visit notes?
- a. To see who has the best handwriting
  - b. To get the aide in trouble with the supervisor
  - c. To make certain the aide follows the care plan/assignment sheet
  - d. To evaluate the physician's services
10. After the agency presents a plan to correct any problems found during the survey, there is no need for the surveyor to do another survey.
- a. True
  - b. False

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