

Aligning your organization's philosophy of care with your community's diverse needs is an amazing, often overwhelming undertaking. Communicating between your hospice or home health organization and your community -sharing ideas, needs, goals and frustrations is the only way to ensure your vision remains a vibrant part of your ever-changing community.

So, how does your organization measure the value of your philosophy within your community?

The National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) describes the average hospice patient as a Caucasian female, over 65 years old, with a non-Cancer diagnosis, like Heart Disease¹. The 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Census Estimates show our communities as growing more and more diverse every year². Why is this important for you? Organizations that manage to integrate their communities successfully often combine a strong "calling" or organizational mission, a dedicated team of providers that have translated the mission into their personal beliefs, with funding from payer sources and community supporters. And, they know the value of measuring their philosophy's benefits for their community, and sharing that information with their communities.

The community politics of gathering provider resources, navigating family, patient, staff and community concerns, and gathering concessions while navigating conflicts will always be present. If your organization can show your community how your philosophy of care translates to well cared for patients, community education, productive and content staff, and a financially solvent community partner – then you have a beginning measurement system. But you need more: you need clinical, financial and administrative measurement tools. Even beyond that, how do you measure the impact of a community presentation to your police force that allows a police officer to provide emotional care for a suicide victim's family member? How do you measure the impact of a family member, who just happens to be a surgeon, the mayor, or a school superintendent, able to perform their jobs because they know that their loved one is receiving exceptional care? How do you measure the impact of a staff member's ability to go home feeling empowered at the end of their shift from the local hospital, because your hospice counselor was able to spend some time with them? How do you measure the impact of a community hospice volunteer that donates their time back to others in need? Is it possible to measure the impact to another person's soul, who's been reinforced by helping another? You know these events happen – they happen every day in home care organizations around the nation. But how can they be measured?

Hospice and Home Care organizations have been very creative when answering that question. Community Memorials or Life Celebrations filled with music, dance, prayers and special celebrations have offered communities an ability to participate and testify to the healing power of philosophy translated into care. Some hospices are offering pet bereavement programs and memorials through their local humane societies for those grieving for the animal members of their family. Even routine touches of community members can be measurements of your organization's care philosophy. From Financial Wellness Pre-Planning Seminars to Pediatric Grief and Loss Events, to Teen Grief Camps, or to Divorce/Partner Loss – these all represent community touchpoints intersecting with your organization's philosophy. Fine, you say, how do we track those events? Just the thought of it overwhelms me!!!

It is possible, and can be simple. But first, let's talk about some of the steps necessary to get us to that goal.

First, understanding your community's population allows you to define your goals when you extrapolate your mission from that beginning. Is your goal to make an impact to 10% of your community, across all lines? Less? More? You can find your community population information, and much, much more on your Chamber of Commerce website. Failing that, you can look up your state's census statistics on your state website.

Next, decide how to begin impacting your community. A good place to start is to partner with other civic organizations. Your co-relating philosophies sometimes create magic. You have a resource to turn to, when someone in need turns to you. Work with your community schools for pediatric bereavement events; your local hospitals to create monthly patient memorials and hospice or home care inservices, or bereavement education events, or loss and listening support groups, or aroma therapy events, and the list goes on. Work with local businesses to request volunteers, and educate them on living wills, and how pre-planning impacts survivors. Do an inservice on the impact of Stress and Grief in a person's life, healthy lifestyle information, or any pertinent information. Find government resources within your state and federal umbrellas. Grants have always been a resource, and most states publish a resource book of charitable organizations, the services they offer and the guidelines of their program. Submit your information to be published as a resource. I found it called the *Directory of Associations* at http://www.marketingsource.com/index.php?v=associations_home. I also found it as a *Social Service Directory* on other sites. There are online resources as well, including www.philanthropyjournal.org. Also, Publication 78, *Cumulative List of Organizations described in Section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986*, is a list of organizations eligible to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions. This online version is offered to help you conduct a more efficient search of these organizations. <http://www.irs.gov/app/pub-78/>. Another way to allow your state offices to assist your philosophy is to utilize existing resources they offer – when was the last time you listed your organizational events on your water, gas, or electricity bills? Many state organizations not only allow listing community events, but actively look for ways to keep connected.

You've probably already connected with your Police and EMS community resources, but have you considered connecting with your community's public health agencies? Local churches offer a great resource, and will often allow a few minutes before services for home care organizations to speak. Of course, you've connected with all groups within your community- cultural, religious, lifestyle, single parent families, emotional well being, and vocation groups. Don't forget the vendors that you work with – they're also a proponent of your mission, and another way to impact your community.

Building and sustaining a network of care providers requires finding commonalities within each provider's philosophy, developing assessment tools, and bringing staff in to create interdisciplinary ways of assessing services and outlining service products. With coordination, services are richer and broader for the patient, family, staff and providers. With planning and careful implementation it empowers accountability through your organization's service offerings.

One last consideration before the measurements: Train your staff to discuss a ‘big picture’ of services; not focus narrowly on their piece. Ask each employee to develop a 60 second description of the services your organization provides, and be prepared to share. A hospice or home health organization is an often misunderstood part of every community. Many community members have not utilized services and completely misunderstand what those services are. With the current health care debates, those misunderstandings have the capacity to widen, but your staff can help your community understand what you do and do not offer.

So, how does your organization measure the value of your philosophy within your community?

Organizations approach this differently. First, you document. Create a list of all attendees at every hospice event – including those standing on the periphery, and those who came late and left early. Ask every employee to document additional friends and family members present at patient visits. Document how new referrals heard of you – and how they came to call you. Have they ever known anyone who’s used your services in the past? When you receive a call or process a donation form, do you have a way to document how that donor has found you, and why they want to support your mission? When you orient a new volunteer – are you documenting how they heard about you, and how you’ve impacted their lives previously? Are you doing ‘spot checks’ with civic and governmental organizations, even police and EMS groups, to see who you’ve impacted, and how? Lunch and learns for your civic organizations, including your local police, EMS and school officials is an often missed way to impact others caring for your communities.

You can also use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) program that offers resources that assist you with tracking “Lives Touched” by your organization. Many offer physician, vendor and donor tracking. Others, like Suncoast Solutions, offer reporting abilities to assist with the administrative functions of tracking referrals to admissions, and other critical information.

Even with rigorous documentation, you’ll never be able to fully understand how deeply your philosophy has touched your community. But again, that’s another way your philosophy continues to provide value to your community.

- 1 http://www.nhpco.org/files/public/Statistics_Research/NHPCO_facts-and-figures_2008.pdf
- 2 http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=01000US&_street=&_county=&_cityTown=&_state=&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&_ActiveGeoDiv=&_useEV=&_pctxt=fph&_pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&_ds_name=null&_ci_nbr=null&_qr_name=null&_reg=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=

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