Tactics for building consumer trust

Why transparency is the key to shattering myths about long term care

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Just 23% of adults say that they have confidence in long term care providers.[1] This disheartening statistic was uncovered during a recent research study conducted by NRC Health.

That percentage dips even lower for adults aged 65 or older. These people face the realistic possibility of being a long term care customer in the near future—yet just 20% of them put their trust in these providers.

If you are an executive leader within a post-acute organization, you likely are not surprised by these numbers. You already know that the industry suffers from a perception problem.

But what's to be done about it? How can you win back public trust?

To solve the problem, you should devise a strategy to reframe public perceptions. And the bedrock for that strategy should be **transparency.**

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STAND OUT FROM COMPETITORS BY OFFERING CLARITY AND AUTHENTICITY

TRANSPARENCY REVEALS THE TRUTH

Transparency means showing your customers the truth. And the truth is, post-acute care staff are as dedicated as any other health professionals. They know how well they're serving residents.

But the average person rarely sees these staff at work. The survey quoted earlier sampled members of the general adult population, most of whom have no direct experience with the industry. They've never used the service themselves, nor have they had family members reside in a post-acute care community.

This may explain why 77% of them distrust these facilities: lacking firsthand experiences, they lean on confused stereotypes to inform their opinions.

But among people who have actually been customers themselves, or who had family members reside in a long term care community, **88% of them said that they would recommend the service.**[2]

This presents an important opportunity for leadership. If leadership can capture and publish positive experience data from the satisfied 88%, they can *prove* that your locations are sites of comfort and convalescence. Transparency can reveal dedication to *wellness*, not just caretaking.

THE COSTS OF CONFUSION

It's urgent for healthcare leaders to undertake this endeavor as soon as possible. You need to dispel the toxic myth that post-acute care communities provide sub-standard care. That myth's not just bad for business—it's also becoming a major public-health problem.

Political groups use this outdated stereotype to affect policy, often to the detriment of seniors. They argue— falsely—that because providers don't meet standards, they should suffer punitive cuts in government funding.

These advocacy groups often target Medicaid, which dedicates 42% of its budget to long term care.[3] Facing a swelling resident population and startling staff shortfalls,[4] providers can't afford to lose this vital source of funding. Without political support, quality of care will significantly regress.

And the impact is not restricted to politics. It has serious implications for individuals, too. As seniors age, they lose their physical independence as their bodies increasingly limit their ability to care for themselves. Loved ones rarely have the time to provide 24-hour support, and live-in caretakers can be prohibitively expensive. For these people, long term care should be an appealing alternative.

But instead, their misguided perceptions lead them to resentment when family members try to "put them in a home." That's not a healthy or sustainable attitude to take toward their care.

TRANSPARENCY GUIDES GOOD DECISIONS

Despite their negative attitudes, though, 73% of adults say that it's important to have a plan to pay for long term care.[5] That means they've considered their own prospects for seeking care.

This should be a signal to you. These adults want good, reliable guidance in selecting a quality location. They'll reward organizations that make the choice easier by being forthright and honest.

Build transparency into your organization's marketing strategy, and you show that you understand the modern healthcare consumer. These people—your potential residents and their families— face a bewildering field of options when they make a care decision. Your business will stand out from others by offering clarity and authenticity.

That's why it's so important to embrace transparency as the foundation for your marketing strategy.

1   NRC Health Market Insights Syndicated Study (2017). https://nrchealth.com/solutions/market-insights/.
2   NRC Health Survey of LTC Residents and Family Members (2016). https://nrchealth.com/solutions/market-insights/.
3   Rau, Jordan. "Medicaid Cuts May Force Retirees Out of Nursing Homes." New York Times [New York, New York], June 24, 2017.
4   Smikle, Joanne L. "Why They Stay: Retention Strategies for Long Term Care." *Provider* Magazine. November, 2015.
5   NRC Health Market Insights Syndicated Study (2017). https://nrchealth.com/solutions/market-insights/.

The implications are clear: long term care organizations should prioritize a strong online presence, built from authentic resident reviews.

TACTICS FOR A TRANSPARENT ONLINE PRESENCE

The Internet is the most important arena in which to focus your transparency efforts. In fact, a recent NRC Health study showed that 77% of consumers begin their healthcare search online.[6]

72% of adults say that online ratings and reviews are important when evaluating a long term care location. 53% say they trust these reviews—compared to 6.4% for email campaigns, or 9.45% for television ads.[7]

The implications are clear: long term care organizations should prioritize a strong online presence, built from authentic resident reviews.

Here are three important tactics that will help you deliver what your customers want to see.

GATHER—AND USE—EXPERIENCE DATA

As mentioned earlier, research from NRC Health proves that 88% of long term care residents would recommend their providers. Administrators should reinforce that point with customer-experience data.

They should find a reliable mechanism to gather meaningful feedback from their residents, families, and employees. What's more, they must take care to be transparent about the way they use this feedback, and they need to draw large volumes of responses for the results to appear credible.

Providers can use this data for service recovery and improvement. They can also publish positive results and success stories to underscore the quality of their care.

MONITOR THIRD-PARTY RATINGS

But the efforts can't stop there. You should also carefully account for your reputation across the Internet. Ratings on third-party websites like Facebook and Yelp can exert a powerful influence on consumer choices. You can't afford to ignore them.

Watch these ratings closely, and respond to them. Challenge libelous or false statements, but thank *honestly* critical reviewers for their feedback. This engagement will show your organization's commitment to transparency—and will make a strong impression with consumers.

PUBLISH RATINGS ON YOUR COMMUNITY'S SITE

Often, though, these third-party websites don't give potential customers the information they need. Typically, sites like Facebook and Yelp draw from only a handful of reviews, which are unverified and unreliable. Providers should not allow these websites to speak for them.

Instead, you should publish verified star rankings on your own websites. This helps control the conversation, and will also streamline the response process. And most important of all, it prominently reassures future residents and their families that they've found a provider they can trust.

BE AN ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CARE

Post-acute care deserves a better public perception. Because the reality is, staff at these organizations work hard to care for some of the country's most vulnerable population, and they should be commended for it.

So build a better reputation for your community. Develop a strong online presence that shatters misperceptions about your care. Show human understanding, and earn back the trust of your customers.

LEARN MORE AT:
nrchealth.com/transparency

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6   NRC Health Market Insights Syndicated Study (2015). https://nrchealth.com/solutions/market-insights/.
7   NRC Health Market Insights Syndicated Study (2017). https://nrchealth.com/solutions/market-insights/.

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