



# Break Glass in Case of Fire

By Paula Pitman, RN, BSN, MBA



In today's economy and healthcare industry, there are multiple wildfires springing up due to changing regulation, diminishing resources and competing priorities. Outcomes are impacted by how well resources are applied, resulting in either controlled damages or utter devastation. When do you ask for help to manage your agency and at what price? As an RN and Clinical Operations Consultant, I've always shied away from the marketing and business development aspects of our consulting practice. But there is wisdom in knowing when to "break the glass" in case of fire. Don't lose sight of how quickly and costly that fire can become when you can't fight it alone and you wait too long to call in expertise and resources.

## **When the Fire is Smoldering. . .**

Typically, we see agencies managing quality and compliance programs by performing clinical audits...at least in general practice. When taking a closer look, the validity of the audit outcomes are often skewed by clinicians who have been corralled to get a few reviews done, and have had minimal training on how to audit or little investment in the outcomes. Consider, much like the financial world, contracting that external "auditor" to do periodic checks on your clinical documentation reviews. It's an investment that will validate either your 100% compliance results are on target or give you a jump on correcting serious deficiencies that increase your risk of RAC, ZPIC, ADR or survey audits. The investment spent for prevention will likely save you from losing precious revenue down the road.

## **Save the Mission**

Often agencies have been innocently following practices and processes that were created in the early stages of providing home health and hospice services. They take on new information systems, the OASIS C, new payer plans, quality initiatives, and continue to force the increasing square pegs into round holes. The fire of financial downturns flare, and the mission is in jeopardy. Get the experts in to ask those hard questions of how and when does staff perform critical tasks and evaluate how well it supports timely cash flow. The structure you have set in your staff model should be easy to navigate through to keep the fires out; not create barriers that will impede a financial rescue.

## **Expect the Best for Your Investment**

One of the best compliments I ever received from a client was "You don't act like a consultant; this has been a great help!" The branding that goes along with the generic term "consultant" usually reflects "a lot of money for a whole lot of nothing that can be applied in a real practical world." Only experience with consultants that invest themselves in your success and customize their approach to the problem at hand can re-brand that investment as worthwhile. Don't hesitate to look for that individual approach! Not everyone's fire has the same environment, accelerants, or risk. The most known or high priced consultant is not necessarily the most effective. Ask about the consultant's approach as they work in your agency, the practical application of their recommendations and get an example of their deliverables. Best of luck in managing your fires, and please don't hesitate to call us if you need a consultant to stand alongside you to extinguish them quickly and effectively.

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**For expert homecare advice, consult the experts**