What to Expect at a CARF Accreditation Survey

Tom Sefcik, ACSW, MBA
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A CARF accreditation survey doesn't have to be a situation where your organization is fearful if you're prepared. A surveyor is a professional who is seeking to give recognition to an organization that is doing its best to serve its community. Several steps will occur when the CARF surveyor comes to the facility. He or she will be spending two to three days in your location reviewing files and interviewing personnel to assess where your organization stands in complying with standards established by CARF. Recommendations for improvement are given at the end of which time it must apply again for new accreditation. The first time for accreditation will be the most challenging, with procedures new to the organization outlined, but with changing staff and regulations, each time will have its trials. Hiring a CARF consultant from PowderHorn Consulting on either a first time or repeat certification is recommended for best results.

A typical CARF accreditation schedule

When CARF accreditation surveyor arrives, he or she will most likely check into a hotel to drop off his or her bags. A CARF consultant will suggest that the organization have the policies, procedures and plans in hard copy as well as on DVD at the hotel for the surveyor to review and possibly download to their computer. This way, the surveyor can go into the first conference with knowledge of the organization. An orientation meeting will take place next, with board members, staff and clients invited. Afterwards, the administrative surveyor may want to review files or possibly meet with the administrative or program resource staff members. Setting up appointments for the Administrative surveyor to meet with Quality Assurance, Financial Planning, HR, IT and other departments found in the standards is advised to show the surveyor that your organization is ready for the survey. No particular order is required by CARF to follow, yet you may want to allow some time for the surveyor to review the files regarding the organization before he or she goes to an interview. A Program CARF surveyor is from the clinical side and he or she will most likely want to see an actual program to gain a better understanding of the service provider programs.
Some surveys will last two days, and others three, with the task of checking off up to 1400 standards set by CARF during that time. The CARF accreditation team will be writing a report during the visit with the expectation to complete it the next day, tying up any last details in the morning. For the report, the team will be responsible for scoring the standards and then making recommendations for improvement. Often, the early afternoon is a time to converse with the CARF team to receive suggestions from the surveyors and learn about what other facilities are doing.

Organizations that use the expertise of a CARF consultant from PowderHorn Consulting have a much better chance of being prepared, have a more relaxed presentation, and will most likely receive fewer recommendations. CARF accreditation should be a learning experience that should not be dreaded.

*PowderHorn Consulting is staffed by professionals who have served as providers, executives on treatment organizations and have an extensive history as CARF surveyors and can assist and answer any questions you may have in the CARF accreditation process.*
About the author:

**TOM SEFCIK, ACSW, MBA**

Tom received his Masters of Social Work degree from the Tulane University in New Orleans LA with an emphasis in clinical services specializing in child/youth/family services. He received his Masters of Business Administration from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN with an emphasis in marketing and information technology. Tom has provided services as a clinician in emergency response, inpatient services, outpatient treatment for child, youth, adult, family and group therapy, and community and business development. He has served in the roles of director of a variety of individual clinical programs as well as clinical director of behavioral healthcare organizations. Most recently, he has served in the role of executive director of several behavioral healthcare organizations that provided services to over 3,500. Most recently he has served as Chief Operating Officer for a nationally recognized benefits management organization providing services to persons with autism spectrum disorders.

In the position of a CARF surveyor, Tom has provided services in both the administrative and program surveyor roles for behavioral health, opioid treatment programs, juvenile justice, and children and youth services in both the United States and Canada.