

Faces Behind-the-Scenes Profile...

Susie Botello:

A Compassionate Problem Solver—Advancing Both Customer Satisfaction and the Bottom Line

Typically, we think of clinicians as the health care workers who have to strike a balance between their desire to help people and the fact that health care is a business—even non-profits need revenue to keep the doors open. But, realistically, it is equally critical for members of the office staff to care as much about the customers as they do the bottom line. And that is just the type of role model alternate-site infusion employee who is the focus of this Faces Behind-the-Scenes spotlight—providing us all a tangible example of how building strong customer relationships *and* being a good fiscal steward for the organization aren't mutually exclusive concepts!

"Everyone knows if you don't have talent in your front office, you can't bill and you don't have an infusion company at all," observes Linda Breakie, R.N., CRNI®, President of Complete Infusion Services in Livonia, Michigan. That's why Breakie put Susie Botello at the helm of her organization's referral services department. "Susie considers the patient and our referral source to be our customers and assures that we meet all of their needs." At the same time, she adds, Botello has taken steps to assure that the intake and billing functions

of the organization work in harmony, bringing in revenue as quickly and effectively as possible in order to keep the provider financially strong.

Botello, who joined Complete Infusion in 2002, manages two intake coordinators (who work with referral sources, payers, and patients upon admission) and two customer service representatives (who are responsible for arranging for supplies and deliveries once patients are on service). Her department consistently scores high on patient satisfaction surveys and is often showered with very specific praise for their efforts to make the intake process as painless as possible.

"When I visit our referral sources, they can't say enough good things about Susie and her team," says Breakie. "Same thing with the patient satisfaction surveys. And I know it's because of Susie's leadership."

Complete Infusion's intake team makes it their policy to call back with a verification of benefits *within an hour of referral*. "Most of the time, they are able to do it," observes Breakie. That translates to a great deal of industry knowledge, well-established payer contacts, and a high degree of thoroughness. "They are real problem solvers, and Susie often works on the most difficult



Susie Botello, Manager of Referral Services for Complete Infusion Services in Livonia, Michigan

cases herself," continues Breakie. "She even assists our nurses and pharmacists over the weekend when they receive unexpected referrals."

Speedy and accurate intake is critical, reiterates Breakie. "It's really important that we get this part right, and we're lucky to have someone in charge that we trust." Inaccuracies at the front end can affect patients who could potentially face coverage denials—and financial responsibility for services rendered. In addition, mistakes at intake make it harder on a reimbursement department—from submitting claims to collecting funds.

"If things aren't functioning well, the intake and the reimbursement departments can be at odds," says Breakie. "But Susie ensures that her department works seamlessly with reimbursement." The fact Botello was

recommended as one of the exemplary "faces behind-the-scenes" by Reimbursement Manager Teresa Guarino is a testament to the multidisciplinary approach she lives and breathes with her co-workers. "She even assists the account managers with marketing calls," adds Breakie.

"Susie and her small staff have assisted the reimbursement department with collection calls," Breakie continues. "And this year, she has gotten her staff to think differently about the collection of patient co-pays and deductibles, collecting on the front end—when appropriate—rather than the back end."

Patient collections is a perennial challenge for many providers because often it feels uncomfortable to ask patients for money, explains Breakie. Botello has found that making the responsibility clear—and manage-

Who's working "behind-the-scenes" to make your organization great?

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able—up front is an effective method of broaching the subject. It's a subject that comes up more and more as Americans lose their health care coverage or face higher co-pays and deductibles if they have coverage. Times are tight, observes Breakie, but often funds collected from patients can mean the difference between working at net loss or gain.

"She's very compassionate," adds Breakie. "I've heard her telling patients, 'We don't want this to be overwhelming to you' and then she works out a payment plan that they can handle." The key to success is all in the approach and the systems Botello has created, according to Breakie.

While Botello's knowledge and skill are apparent, it's her character

that is what's really valued most by her colleagues—and her customers, alike. "Susie applies her superior customer service skills to everything she does," says Breakie. "She's a working manager and great leader. When one of her staff is mentioned for great service, she celebrates it with the whole department. She is an ambassador for our company." Without a doubt, Susie Botello serves as a vivid reminder for us all that building strong internal and external customer relationships *and* being a good fiscal steward for one's company are actually foundational, interrelated ingredients to success for any alternate-site infusion organization. This is a powerful insight we should all take to heart—daily! ▀

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