Virginia Department of Health

Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection

October 27, 2003

Feeding/hydration Assistants

Introduction

It has been determined that residents without complicated feeding problems receive little or no assistance at mealtimes with eating or drinking, while the nursing staff focuses on assisting residents with complicated feeding problems. In order to address this issue, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has developed requirements for single-task workers, i.e., feeding/hydration assistants[1], in long-term care facilities. The program is being extended to include all nursing facilities in Virginia, whether federally certified or not.

The purpose of this program is to ensure that residents needing only encouragement, minimal assistance, or non-medical supervision, are assisted with eating and drinking as needed. Feeding/ hydration assistants are intended to be adjuncts to, but not replacements for, certified nursing assistants.[2] Therefore, feeding/hydration assistants cannot assist with complicated feeding cases such as recurrent lung aspirations, difficulty swallowing, or with tube or parenteral/IV feedings.

Feeding/hydration assistants cannot replace existing licensed or certified staff and cannot be counted toward meeting or complying with any requirements for nursing care staff and functions of a facility, including any minimum nursing staffing requirement imposed under section 1819 or 1919 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395i-3, 1396r).

Resident selection to receive assistance from feeding/hydration assistants shall be based on the charge nurse's assessment, the resident's most recent assessment, and the resident's plan of care.

To ensure consistency in the training of feeding/hydration assistants, training criteria have been identified. Administrators must ensure that their feeding/hydration assistants meet the requirements of the established criteria. *The burden of proof is on the facility to ensure that the program addresses all the requirements of the program and that any feeding/ hydration assistant is properly trained.*

---

[1] Volunteers, who are usually family members, may also feed residents because the law and regulations exclude volunteers from the definition of certified nurse aides. Volunteers are exempt from the training requirements, however it is recommended that volunteers participate in training as part of their orientation.

[2] This allows facilities to train other facility employees as feeding assistants so that available staff can feed residents at mealtimes.

Definitions

"Covered task" means feeding and/or hydration. The term does not include (i) administrating medication; (ii) providing direct medical care, including taking vital signs, skin or wound care; or (iii) performing range of motion or other therapeutic exercises with residents.

"Feeding/hydration assistant" means an individual who has successfully completed an approved feeding/hydration training course and is paid by a facility to feed residents, or who is used under an arrangement with another agency or organization and meets the criteria contained herein. Feeding/hydration assistants cannot perform any other nursing or nursing-related tasks.

General Rules

A. A feeding/hydration assistant may perform a covered task only for those residents who:

- Need assistance with eating and drinking and
- *Do not have* a clinical condition that requires the assistance of a registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, or CNA with eating and drinking as documented in the resident's written plan of care or the comprehensive assessment of the resident's functional capacity.

B A feeding/hydration assistant must successfully complete a minimum of 8 hours of approved training and may perform a covered task only under the supervision of a registered nurse or licensed practical nurse, licensed by the Board of Nursing, who is available to provide assistance to the feeding/hydration assistant if necessary.

C. Prior to participating in the program, a facility must submit to the Center its training program based on the criteria included under "Feeding/hydration Assistant Training Requirements" in this guideline.

Note: Administrators must complete the attached form in its entirety and submit it along with their complete feeding/hydration program to:

Training Division
Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection
3600 West Broad Street. Ste. 216
Richmond, VA. 23230

Facilities may not begin training or using trained assistants until they have received written notice from the Center.

D. The facility must maintain a record of all individuals successfully completing the feeding/hydration training course with its other in-service training records. Confirmation of successful completion of the course shall be maintained in the feeding/hydration assistant's personnel folder.

E. Facilities must report all incidents of any feeding/hydration assistant who has been found to abuse or neglect a resident, or misappropriate resident property.

F. Feeding/hydration assistants *cannot* be counted toward meeting or complying with *any* requirement for nursing care staff and functions of a facility, including any minimum nurse staffing requirements. Periodically, facilities will be required to submit to the Center data regarding the performance on covered tasks by the feeding/hydration assistants in the format and at the times requested by the Center. Such requests may include, but are not limited to:

1. The number of residents identified as benefiting from the feeding/hydration assistance program;
2. The number of feeding/hydration assistants trained and routinely utilized by the facility to assist identified residents.

G. A facility shall notify the Center 30 working days in advance of any changes being made to their training program.

H. Feeding/hydration assistant training records may be shared between facilities in the case of qualified assistants changing employment.

Feeding/hydration Assistant Training Requirements

A. The feeding/hydration assistant training program shall relate to the performance of the covered task to be performed and contain, *but is not limited to*, the following criteria:

1. Feeding techniques and assistance with eating and drinking;
2. Communication and interpersonal skills including appropriate responses to resident behavior;
3. The importance of good nutrition and hydration, including familiarity with signs of malnutrition and dehydration;
4. Recognizing changes in residents that are inconsistent with their normal behavior and the importance of reporting those changes to the supervisory nurse;
5. An overview of the aging and disease process as it relates to nutrition and hydration;
6. Responding to safety and emergency procedures, including the Heimlich maneuver and alerting licensed staff to other health emergencies;
7. Infection control and universal precautions to prevent the spread of communicable diseases and food borne illnesses; and

8. Resident's rights.

In addition, it is recommended that training courses include return demonstrations of feeding/hydration using fellow trainees. It is also recommended that assistants pass a competency evaluation prior to assisting residents with a covered task.

It is expected that facilities participating in this program will exceed the required minimum criteria in order to assure the health and safety of all its residents.

Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection
Virginia Department of Health

Nursing Facility Feeding/Hydration Training Program

Facility Name:_____ Date Submitted:_____

Complete this form in its entirety and send it along with the complete feeding/hydration training program to:
Training Division
Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection
3600 West Broad St., Ste. 216
Richmond, VA 23230

REQUIRED TRAINING PROGRAM ELEMENTS		
Content of Training Program	**Location of Element in the Program Content**	**Instructor(s) Responsible for Teaching Content**
Feeding techniques		
Communication and interpersonal skills		
Good nutrition • Overview of aging process • Signs of dehydration and malnutrition • Types of dietary restrictions		
Recognizing and reporting inconsistencies in resident behavior		
Safety and emergency procedures • Use of the Heimlich maneuver • Alerting licensed staff to other health emergencies		
Infection control and universal precautions		
Resident rights		
OPTIONAL ELEMENTS INCLUDED BY FACILITY		

I certify that this training program meets the requirements for assuring feeding and hydration assistant are qualified to assist identified residents.

_____ _____
Signature of Facility Administrator Date

CQHCCP Program: Approved ☐ Disapproved ☐ Date:_____