Tracer Methodology
Tracer Methodology - A Systems Approach to Evaluation

- The approach, known as the tracer methodology, traces a number of patients through the organization’s entire health care process.
- As cases are examined, the surveyor may identify performance issues in one or more steps of the process – or in the interfaces between processes.
Tracer Methodology

- Process surveyors use during on-site survey
- Initially, uses identified Priority Focus Areas and clinical / service groups
Objectives of Tracer Activity

- Follow course of care and services provided to the patient/client/resident
- Assess relationships among disciplines and important functions
- Evaluate performance of processes relevant to the individual
Tracer Selection Criteria

- Identified Clinical/Service Groups from PFP
- Patient/Client/Resident who received complex services (often those close to discharge)
- Patient/Client/Resident who cross different programs (such as hospital and long term care)
- Patient/Client/Resident who relate to systems tracers
  - Infection Control
  - Medication Management
Selecting Tracer Patients

- Example of additional criteria for hospitals
  - Complex Situations
    - ICU
    - ED
    - Anesthesia Services
    - Labor and Delivery
    - 23 hour admit
Tracer Activity

- Comprises 50 – 60% of on-site survey time
- Will be approximately 90 minutes in length (but can be up to 3 hours)
- Starts in setting/unit where tracer patient/client/resident is located
- May include sequential following of course of care – but no mandated order for visits to other care areas
Tracer Visits Include

- Evaluation of top 4-5 Priority Focus Areas identified in PFP
- Observation of direct care
- Observation of medication process
- PI discussion – staff level
- Staff interviews
- Patient interviews
- Observation of infection control practices
- Observation of environment of care elements
Tracer Visits Include (cont’d)

- Review of open clinical records
- Review of policies as needed
- Education at various points – flexible
Tracer Visits May Include

- Unit tour – incorporate with Tracer
- Site visits, prioritize based on risk
- Pharmacy visit
- Other patient care areas
- Interdisciplinary team review
- Review of additional clinical records (closed)
Systems Analysis

- Set of components that work together toward common goal
- Evaluation of how and how well systems function
- Addresses interrelationships of elements
- Translates standards compliance issues into potential vulnerabilities
Map of Tracer
Date: ______________ Medical Record Number: ______________ Hospital: _____________________ Surveyor: _____________________
Clinical Service Group: _______________________ Rationale for Tracer Selection: _______________________

Survey Methods:
- Staff & surveyor interact
- Medical Record Entries
- Observation

Start & End at same site to recap & validate findings with several other records.

- Survey Methods
  - Staff interaction
  - Patient interviews
  - Medical Records
  - Observation
  - Review of educational materials

Site
(START)

Site
(END)

Site # 1

Site # 2
Map of Tracer

Date: ______________ Medical Record Number: ______________ Hospital: ____________________ Surveyor: ____________________
Clinical Service Group: ____________________ Rationale for Tracer Selection: ____________________

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Questions?