

AN ASSESSMENT OF A MARKETING EDUCATION PROGRAM
FOR NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATORS

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Although marketing is not universally accepted among health care administrators, it has become a widely debated subject. Most of the debate has focused on marketing's applicability to hospitals, health maintenance organizations, and group practices. Until very recently, little attention has been paid to marketing's relevance to nursing homes and other facilities in the long-term health care industry.

Marketing is an important managerial process in the nursing home industry for at least two reasons. First, the industry as a whole can use marketing concepts and techniques in educating the general public about the needs of nursing home residents and in improving the general image of the industry, especially in regard to nursing homes operated on a "for-profit" basis. Second, individual administrators can use marketing ideas and tools to reach optimum occupancy levels, create better community images, and achieve other important objectives.

Given the present interest in marketing among nursing home administrators and the need for research on the education programs being developed for these administrators, this paper is written to achieve three objectives: (1) to briefly describe a basic marketing education program designed specifically for nursing home administrators, (2) to summarize the results of a survey conducted among the administrators who attended this presentation, and (3) to explore the implications of such research for marketing education in the long-term care industry.

A three-hour presentation titled "Nursing Home Administration from a Marketing Perspective" was developed for the 1980 State Convention of the Iowa Health Care Association (IHCA). Illustrated with 255 color slides, this program was designed to achieve three goals: (1) to explain why marketing is an important activity in nursing home administration, (2) to describe the basic process of marketing management in terms of its applicability to nursing home administration, and (3) to illustrate how nursing home administrators can use specific marketing tools to achieve important objectives.

Immediately before the conclusion of the presentation, 9-page questionnaires were distributed to the 225-250 people attending the program. Of the 185 people completing usable questionnaires, 43 were students, retired individuals, employees of government agencies, owners or employees of nursing homes who were not administrators. The remaining 142 respondents were working as administrators of licensed nursing homes. The data

collected through the questionnaires completed by the 142 administrators were tabulated to provide a profile of these respondents, their reactions to the presentation, their perceptions of marketing and its use in their facilities, and their expressed needs for assistance and education in marketing.

Given the diversity of administrators who attended the IHCA-sponsored presentation and the different types of facilities they manage, it was somewhat surprising to find that this audience responded to the program with relatively little variance in opinion. When asked to rate the content and organization of the presentation, the administrators evaluated the program as being well organized, informative, relevant, and easy to understand.

In addition to giving the presentation relatively high ratings, the administrators suggested that their interest in marketing and their understanding of this subject were greater and less varied after the program. For example, when they were asked to evaluate their interest in marketing before and after the presentation using 0 to 10 scales, there was an increase in the average response of the administrators and less variation in their opinions after the presentation. They rated their interest in marketing before the program as being quite high ($\bar{x} = 7.141$, s.d. = 2.457), but after the program their interest was even greater and less varied ($\bar{x} = 8.500$, s.d. = 1.867).

When asked to assess the importance and use of marketing in their own facilities, a high proportion of the administrators indicated that they believe marketing is a very important managerial process, and nearly all of the administrators said that they used marketing concepts and techniques to at least some extent before they attended the IHCA-sponsored program. However, after attending this presentation, a high percentage said that they would use marketing concepts and techniques more often than they did before, and an equally high number said that they gained specific ideas about how they can use such ideas and tools as a result of the IHCA-sponsored program.

It is important that the research conducted to evaluate the IHCA-sponsored presentation indicated that nursing home administrators would like further marketing education and assistance in developing strategies and tactics for their own facilities. Even though administrators may be increasingly enthusiastic about marketing and many are already using marketing concepts and techniques in managing their nursing homes, there is still a need for continuing education programs that offer specific suggestions about how such ideas and tools can be used in managing a particular facility. In addition to educating administrators, there is a need for offering at least some training in marketing for other nursing home personnel. Consequently, the type of presentation described and assessed in this paper should be considered as only a beginning in marketing education for the nursing home industry.