In 2013 DaVita Hospital Services Group—a leading provider of inpatient kidney care—became the first organization of its kind to receive Ambulatory Health Care Accreditation from The Joint Commission. To reach this goal, DaVita took a collaborative approach, relying on internal audits, staff education, standardized forms and tools, and proactive communication with its hospital partners. The following sections take a closer look at DaVita’s accreditation journey.

**Organization Facts:** DaVita Hospital Services Group—a division of DaVita HealthCare Partners Inc.—provides comprehensive, 24-hour inpatient kidney care in more than 980 hospitals nationwide, delivering more than one million treatments annually.

**Project Description:** Several years ago, DaVita began seeking Joint Commission accreditation to reflect the organization’s commitment to continuous process improvement and to help create national standards of quality and excellence for inpatient kidney care.

**Outcomes:** In 2013 DaVita Hospital Services Group became the first-ever inpatient kidney care services provider to receive Ambulatory Health Care Accreditation. As a result, DaVita is delivering more consistent care across the organization and enjoying stronger relationships with its hospital partners. (Subsequently, other inpatient and ambulatory kidney care providers have also achieved Joint Commission’s Ambulatory Health Care Accreditation.)

**Why Pursue Joint Commission Accreditation?**
DaVita sought Joint Commission accreditation for a number of reasons. “Our organization has always embraced continuous quality improvement, and partnering with The Joint Commission seemed like a logical step in validating our commitment to quality and safety,” says Miki Smith, national director of operations for DaVita Hospital Services Group. “In addition, since there have not traditionally been well-defined standards for inpatient dialysis, we wanted to work with The Joint Commission to develop industry standards and elevate the overall quality and safety of this kind of care.”

Aside from the strategic reasons for pursuing accreditation, this work had additional benefits. “Before any of our nurses can provide care in a hospital, they must be credentialed by each hospital, and those credentialing requirements can vary between institutions,” says Smith. “We were hopeful that accreditation would help us better attest to our nurse’s qualifications, streamlining the credentialing effort and minimizing duplication in the process.”

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Taking a Process-Driven Approach
DaVita employed a multipronged approach to accreditation. Key components of the effort included the following strategies:

**STRATEGY Partner with The Joint Commission upfront.** Before starting down the road to accreditation, DaVita reached out to The Joint Commission to see which accreditation program made the most sense for the organization, learning how its care processes would fit with Joint Commission standards. “Even though we provide care in hospitals, we are not a hospital, so pursuing hospital accreditation was not appropriate,” comments Smith. “Instead, The Joint Commission suggested looking at the ambulatory program as a more logical fit for the type of care we provide.”

After DaVita made the decision to seek accreditation, the organization worked with Joint Commission staff to better understand improvement opportunities. “We shared our patient care flowsheet—a document that we complete for every patient we treat—to get The Joint Commission’s feedback,” says Smith. “We also sought their input about our internal auditing process to determine if we were looking at the right things to gauge performance and survey readiness. Their feedback was instrumental in setting us in the right direction and helping us get started.”

**STRATEGY Create a Joint Commission accreditation team.** DaVita then formed an accreditation team with representation from across their organization. “The team is made up of clinical services specialists (nurses) and operational leaders from each of our nine service areas,” says Smith. “This group was charged with championing the accreditation effort and communicating with staff throughout the organization to get everyone on board and up to speed about how to improve processes and standardize care.”

**STRATEGY Hire additional staff.** Managing accreditation across a large organization like DaVita is no easy feat. “To better support our activities, we hired additional clinical services specialists,” says Smith. “These individuals work with DaVita and hospital staff to improve survey readiness by conducting extensive internal audits, providing comprehensive education, and leading targeted performance improvement activities.”

**STRATEGY Develop an internal survey.** The organization also constructed an internal survey based on the Joint Commission requirements. “Our clinical services specialists administered the survey throughout the organization to make sure each site had the proper processes and procedures in place and was meeting regulatory requirements,” comments Smith. “These audits helped us identify compliance shortfalls and target areas for improvement for each DaVita acute program. We then generated correction plans for all improvement areas, which included specific actions to drive performance and a time frame for completion.”

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**The Care DaVita Provides**

DaVita Hospital Services Group received accreditation for a range of kidney care services, which its licensed and trained nurses perform in hospitals throughout the country.

- **Hemodialysis**: This treatment is for end-stage renal disease patients and those admitted to the hospital with acute renal failure.
- **Peritoneal dialysis**: This is for current dialysis patients as well as patients who are hospitalized with newly diagnosed kidney failure.
- **Apheresis**: This is an extracorporeal therapy to remove a patient’s blood and separate out certain components, such as electrolytes, fluid, and so on.
- **Continuous renal replacement therapy**: This is a slower form of dialysis performed over the course of 24 hours.
- **Ultrafiltration**: This therapy removes excess salt and water to alleviate fluid overload.

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“We shared our patient care flowsheet—a document that we complete for every patient we treat—to get The Joint Commission’s feedback.”

— Miki Smith

**national director of operations for DaVita Hospital Services Group**
**STRATEGY Implement improvement initiatives.** DaVita engaged in a variety of activities to further performance. “We offered several Web-based training seminars, conducted by our clinical services specialists, to educate staff on new and revised processes and procedures,” comments Smith. “We also rolled out new forms, tools, and protocols that would assist in standardizing care across the organization. For example, we developed a uniform way of organizing our employee files to ensure they contained the most up-to-date and comprehensive information. Previously, every facility had their own way of maintaining employee files, which led to inconsistency and sometimes incomplete documentation. As part of accreditation preparation, we determined what needed to be included in an employee file and how the file should be organized. Now, all employee files are organized in the same way.”

**STRATEGY Ready the staff for the on-site survey.** DaVita also prepared staff for interactions with The Joint Commission. “Talking with a surveyor can be intimidating; we wanted to make sure our staff members felt ready for surveyor meetings and comfortable with any interactions,” says Smith. “To get staff ready, we produced a survey preparedness manual that deconstructs the survey process and offers tips and strategies for interacting with Joint Commission surveyors.”

**STRATEGY Communicating proactively with hospitals.** In addition to getting staff ready, DaVita had to prepare its partner hospitals for the experience. “What made our accreditation effort somewhat unique is that the on-site survey took place in hospitals, even though DaVita is evaluated as an ambulatory program,” comments Smith. “To ensure a smooth process, we reached out ahead of time and met with the hospitals to gain their buy-in and support.”

Accreditation was based on a survey of 25% of DaVita’s acute programs participating in the accreditation process. Some of these were located in Joint Commission hospitals, while others were in nonaccredited hospitals that permitted The Joint Commission access for purposes of the on-site survey under the ambulatory program.

To foster hospital cooperation, DaVita created a detailed leave-behind that outlined the accreditation process and addressed several frequently asked questions, including what accreditation means for DaVita and the hospital; how the hospital will be affected by the survey and what they can expect; and how DaVita’s accreditation work goes hand in hand with the hospital’s compliance efforts. “Overall, hospitals were very supportive, willingly opening their doors to ambulatory surveyors and allowing our accreditation process to move forward,” says Smith. “We even received positive comments from hospitals in our annual hospital satisfaction survey, underscoring their appreciation of our Joint Commission accreditation work.”

**Benefits of Accreditation**

DaVita Hospital Services Group has seen many benefits as a result of accreditation. “Probably the biggest advantage is a greater standardization in our approach to care organizationwide,” comments Smith. “With nurses in 980 hospitals across the country, we have the potential for a lot of variation. As a result of our accreditation process, we now use the same forms, tools, and protocols across the organization, facilitating a consistent level of quality.”

The organization has also seen improvement in its internal audit results. “Every year, our clinical services team conducts an organizationwide audit, and smaller audits are performed monthly in each region looks for improvement opportunities,” says Smith. “Since achieving accreditation, we have seen improvement in our internal audit scores, showing the organization is staying close to what it is important and continually enhancing the way we deliver care.”

Ultimately, DaVita credits its success with accreditation to its process-driven approach. “We looked at the way we provided care, supported patient safety, and mitigated risk and broke things down into key areas of improvement,” comments Smith. “We then targeted those areas and worked to implement solutions that ensured compliance and elevated the quality of care we deliver.”