



RehabExpertise  
EXECUTIVE BRIEF SERIES

# The Importance of Clinical Outcomes in Rehab Programs

Today and in the Age of Reform

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# Executive Summary

*This is part of a series of educational papers enhancing rehabilitative services programs. This paper outlines the significance of clinical outcomes in rehab programs and the expertise to look for in a rehab provider.*

There is no denying that healthcare reform continues to be on everyone's minds these days. With the recent changes in the House, and the fact that Congress will likely focus on reducing the budget for the CMS Innovations Center, thereby slowing down innovations that decrease healthcare costs, many are wondering if reform will be repealed.

One of the main areas that reform will be concerned with is quality outcomes; this means that long-term care providers need to be prepared for the increasingly competitive market that will be rewarding clinical outcomes and the demonstrated functional improvement of patients. Providers will find themselves auditioning to work with hospital systems and ACOs (Accountable Care Organizations), and must be fully prepared to show they're providing the highest level of quality outcomes at the lowest cost. This is what will be rewarded.

While repeal remains uncertain, outcomes are still important to provide data and knowledge that support quality improvement, to support marketing efforts to referral sources, and to provide data for evidence-based practice.

## **The Bottom Line**

The new healthcare reform mandates will impact all providers of skilled nursing services. Providers must be prepared to differentiate themselves by showing quality clinical outcomes.

## **What It Means**

Understanding the importance of clinical outcomes measurement and reporting will help providers achieve excellence. Although there is no national standard for measuring outcomes, a skilled rehab provider can establish a successful process that helps LTC providers achieve the desired outcomes and reimbursement levels they deserve.

## **The Takeaway**

No matter the outcome of health care reform, quality clinical outcomes will be necessary. Providers can rise above their competition by focusing on clinical outcomes whether they are in-house or outsourced. A quality rehabilitation partner can help with the preparation needed to position providers for success.

## **The Steps to Success**

The following grid summarizes some expertise that you should look for in a rehab provider to maximize clinical outcomes for your facility if you chose to shift from an in-house program. Familiarity with these details and working with the most skilled rehab provider will position you to best serve your clients and remain compliant with new policies.

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Expertise	What This Means For Your Rehab Program
<b>1</b> Clinical measurement programs and documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data positively impacts census development and referrals, and improves outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> Leader in outcomes management and measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positions you ahead of your competition.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> Organizational excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued performance improvement on outcome data for all rehab patients.</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> Large patient database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used for comparison purposes.</li> </ul>
<b>5</b> Excellence with clinical programs and measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes and achieves functional improvements and overall wellness.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b> Maximize critical components in patient recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established protocols make the most of all elements of recovery</li> </ul>
<b>7</b> Caregivers with expertise managing medically-complex patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skilled team that works together to treat patients with multiple medical issues and resulting impairments.</li> </ul>
<b>8</b> State-of-the-art equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knows optimal equipment and modalities needed to treat a variety of conditions and impairments.</li> </ul>
<b>9</b> Interdisciplinary expertise to provide the best patient care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes early recognition of risk factors to help alleviate interruptions in patient care.</li> </ul>
<b>10</b> Specialized rehab programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Should include a wide range of programs that address the many needs of patients/residents.</li> </ul>

## Importance of Measuring Clinical Outcomes

Clinical outcomes are valuable on several levels. They demonstrate the functional improvements of patients, and they also support quality, census development and financial results, which ultimately leads to solid clinical programs and effective documentation strategies. Finally, clinical outcomes develop and test theories of care delivery, and help healthcare professionals create research-based practice that is focused on clinical experience. What it boils down to is that it is imperative that providers be aware of how to generate the best outcomes to stay competitive.

It is important to note that while outcomes are critical to providers' ability to stay viable, there is not a national standard for measurement. This means providers need to use an established method such as NOMS, FIM, Optimal or Foto, or establish their own measurement process.

## Outcomes Measurement Consists of Three Elements:

- **Outcome evaluation** concentrates on results of services, programs, treatments or intervention strategies.
- **Program evaluation** concentrates on broader elements and includes needs assessment, process evaluation, program efficiency and effectiveness, impact, and outcome evaluation. Administrators and managers must be able to demonstrate that programs are delivering what they promised and are achieving stated goals and objectives established by the provider.
- **Quality management** focuses on all aspects of the organization and patient care by assessing and managing quality according to efficacy, efficiency and appropriateness of treatment.

## Achieving Desired Rehab Outcomes

Outcome measures can be used as a management tool for a provider's interdisciplinary team. Typical problem areas identified using outcomes include: deterioration of functional abilities of patients; lack of anticipated functional improvement; insufficient

## The Importance of Clinical Outcomes in Rehab Programs CONTINUED

treatment; preventable secondary medical complications; unexpected mortality; re-hospitalizations; and excessive program LOS and costs.

As a result, providers have a management tool for the interdisciplinary team, and can better answer questions using report data such as: Who do we treat? What functional changes occurred? What were the discharge locations? How effective and efficient have our services been? What is the ultimate value of our services?

### Effective Communication and Documentation of Patient Outcomes

Providers must also be able to speak effectively with physicians about patient outcomes. A prepared rehab provider will be well versed about measurement and outcomes with a database to capture and track outcomes by patient, discipline and diagnosis. They will meet regularly with physicians to review functional improvements and scores, and outcomes for individual patients, along with overall aggregate scores for the facility by patient, site, and discharge.

The most effective documentation strategy is based on a three-tiered approach: 1) level of function before rehab, 2) status of functional improvement at first evaluation, and 3) status of functional improvement at discharge. Points of comparison should be provided.

Documentation should always promote quality outcomes. This means your in-house program or contract rehab provider should be able to help you achieve scores at evaluation and discharge for each patient that exceeds the admission scores.



## About RehabCare

RehabCare is the leading provider of rehabilitation services, including physical, occupational and speech-language therapies, to over 2,000 hospitals and long-term care facilities in 46 states. We are the premier provider of rehab throughout the full continuum of care, including long-term acute care hospitals, nursing and rehabilitation centers, inpatient acute rehab units, independent rehabilitation facilities and hospice and home care locations.

Our vast network enables you to access best practices and geographic market knowledge that will take your rehab department to the next level. We are a trusted industry expert, and a true strategic partner. And at RehabCare, we are passionate about recovery: working to improve patient outcomes and quality of life.

### Have Questions?

To learn more about how RehabCare can optimize the performance of your rehab department, call us at:

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