Optimizing the Performance of a Hospital Outpatient Rehabilitation Department

Jay Frisch
Regional Vice President
RehabCare

Jim McNamara
Regional Director of Operations
RehabCare
Executive Summary

This is part of a series of educational papers about enhancing rehabilitative services programs. This brief talks about maximizing the performance of the outpatient rehab unit in your hospital.

Are you optimizing the management of your outpatient rehabilitation program? Is your outpatient rehab program contributing positively to the bottom line of your health system?

Outpatient rehabilitation programs are a critical component to the continuum of care for any health system. While not always at the top of the executive agenda, real opportunities exist to improve the quality and financial viability of your outpatient rehabilitation program.

Outpatient Rehab departments are an essential part of a hospital’s overall operation.

OP rehab serves patients from every clinical service line: Orthopedics, Neurology, Oncology, Cardiology, Metabolics, and Women’s and Children’s. A successful outpatient rehabilitation program should be an integral component of your service line and continuum of care strategies.

Outpatient rehab is often the final component of a patient’s episode of care with your health system. It should contribute significantly to the overall quality outcome of that episode of care as well as the overall satisfaction the patient experiences.

As baby boomers age, trends show an increased need for outpatient rehabilitation services. At the same time, ever-changing regulatory and compliance rules are being imposed on outpatient services. These trends create challenges that make expert management more important than ever. Increased requirements for quality and transparency mean that outpatient rehabilitation departments must optimize performance and produce supporting documentation and data.

Well-run outpatient rehabilitation programs require specific expertise and skills to ensure the department is running efficiently. Like most clinical departments, an outpatient rehab program has many “moving parts.” The right leader is critical to ensure that clinical quality, operational efficiency, human resource management, referral development and financial performance are all attended to while consistently maintaining the highest levels of customer satisfaction.

Working with an experienced outpatient rehab partner can help facilities achieve clinical successes and an improved financial return. This paper outlines key success indicators for health systems to optimize the performance of their outpatient rehab programs in order to increase physician and patient satisfaction, improve financial performance, grow volumes and market share and position their organization for success.

Bottom Line

Hospital executives have numerous priorities to focus on daily and one of the biggest is making sure that their facility is performing at the highest level. This includes an well-run outpatient rehab department that provides efficient and effective quality outcomes while delivering a positive contribution to the bottom line of the health system.

What It Means

Although most healthcare executives might not immediately cite them as an example, outpatient rehab programs absolutely serve as a vital component to the continuum of care, can contribute positively to the health system brand within the community and help maintain a positive financial bottom line. This means putting the right elements in place to set and achieve a high level of clinical quality, service quality and operational/financial performance outcomes is very important.

The Takeaway

A highly-skilled rehab management partner can position a health system’s outpatient rehab department for success. The right rehab partner provides a combination of expertise and strategic oversight to increase performance in an outpatient rehabilitation department.
### Imperatives to Optimize the Performance of a Hospital Outpatient Rehabilitation Department (March 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Services and Programs</td>
<td>The development and implementation of niche clinical programs is a critical component of a successful Outpatient Rehab program. Does your OP Rehab program deliver specialty programs that differentiate it from other OP Rehab programs? Do these programs augment the key service lines of your health system? Do you invest in specialty training for your OP therapy staff? Do your OP Rehab programs support your continuum of care and adequately serve your patients as they move through your health system? Do these programs engage your employed/affiliated physicians? Do these OP programs help support and promote your health system brand within the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Staffing &amp; Labor Management</td>
<td>A well-run OP Rehab department requires a plan and constant attention to the daily operation of the team. Do you have productivity standards for your OP Rehab program? Do you have the right skill mix of therapists-assistants-techs on your OP Rehab team? Is your staffing mix appropriate for the daily patient volumes seen in your OP Rehab center?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Efficiency and Processes</td>
<td>Best practices should be developed and adopted to ensure patient needs are met in an efficient and effective manner. How efficient is your OP Therapy team? How effective is your scheduling system/process in managing staff levels and productivity? Is your front desk intake process streamlined to optimize a positive patient experience? Is your team managing no-show/cancellation rates? Is your team managing self-discharges to ensure that patients optimize their prescribed number of treatments? Does your therapy team see new patients within 48 hours of the referral?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Quality Measures and Outcomes</td>
<td>The participation in quality initiatives is critical for continued quality improvement, quality outcomes and referral development. Does your OP department actively participate in your health system’s quality improvement program? Does your OP Rehab team track quality measures and work to continually improve clinical and customer service quality? Does your OP Rehab team measure specific clinical quality outcomes pertinent to OP rehab? Are your physicians engaged in your OP Rehab quality improvement process? Are your quality outcome results used to market the program and develop new patient referrals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Financial Metrics</td>
<td>A successful Outpatient Rehab program should contribute positively to the bottom line of your health system. Do you know if your OP Rehab program is profitable? Does your OP Rehab leader monitor net revenue and direct/indirect expenses on a monthly basis? Are you optimizing the collection of co-pays? Is your OP Rehab team knowledgeable in a compliant and appropriate charge process to optimize reimbursement? Is your charge description master up to date?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Volume Growth</td>
<td>An organized, focused marketing plan and process should result in continued growth of your OP Rehab patient volumes. Do you have a specific marketing plan for your OP Rehab program that has shown consistent volume and market share growth? Does your OP Rehab program track physician referrals? Are your OP Rehab marketing initiatives integrated into your hospital marketing plan? Does your OP rehab program have the ability to expand into additional sites in your community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Documentation and Billing</td>
<td>Appropriate documentation and billing lead to a financially viable program and ensure compliance in an ever-changing regulatory environment. Does the therapy team’s clinical documentation support its charges? Does your OP Rehab program conduct monthly chart and billing reviews? Is your therapy team knowledgeable about specific payer coding and documentation rules? Is your billing-collections process effective in maximizing reimbursement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Appropriate Leadership</td>
<td>Having the right OP Rehab Leader in place is essential to maintaining an effective, efficient, financially successful program. Is your director skilled in clinical treatment, program development, staffing and productivity, compliance and regulatory monitoring, financial and operational management? Does your director have the support from the health system to operate a successful OP Rehab Program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Compliance and Accreditation</td>
<td>Knowing and complying with regulatory standards is an essential function for the OP Rehab department. Is your rehab team actively involved in the accreditation process (Joint Commission, State, others)? Is your therapy team knowledgeable in and adhere to the Medicare rules governing OP Rehab practice and the State Practice Act for Physical-Occupational-Speech Therapists?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

800.545.0749, ext. 7640

Visit us at:
www.rehabcare.com