The Importance of Clinical Outcomes in Rehab Programs

Today and in the Age of Healthcare Reform

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**Executive Summary**

This paper outlines the significance of clinical outcomes in rehab programs and the expertise to look for in a post-acute rehab provider. Post-acute care is a critical part of quality improvement and patient-centered care.

There is no denying that healthcare reform continues to be on everyone’s minds these days. The industry is moving towards a value-based purchasing system that seeks reimbursement linked to performance. One of the main areas that reform will be concerned with is quality outcomes; this means that providers will be rewarded for positive clinical outcomes and the demonstrated functional improvement of patients. Providers must be fully prepared to show they’re providing the highest level of quality outcomes at the lowest cost.

Outcomes are important to provide data and knowledge that support quality improvement, and to provide data for evidence-based practice.

**The Bottom Line**
The new healthcare reform mandates will impact all providers from short-term acute care hospitals to skilled nursing services. Post-acute care is an important part of the evolving healthcare marketplace. A focus on quality clinical outcomes is paramount to succeeding in this changing healthcare environment.

**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 should establish a successful process that:

1. helps hospitals achieve the desired outcomes for their patients
2. prevents return to acute care
3. where clinically appropriate, substitutes acute days in the hospital setting with less expensive post-acute days in a setting such as a skilled nursing center.

**The Takeaway**
No matter the outcome of health care reform, quality clinical outcomes will be necessary. A quality rehabilitation partner can help with the preparation needed to position providers for success.

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**The Steps to Success**
The grid on the next page summarizes some of the expertise that you should look for in a rehab provider to maximize clinical outcomes for your patients. Familiarity with these details and working with the most skilled rehab provider will position you to best serve your patients and respond to the changing healthcare environment.

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Expertise Benefit for You and Your Patients

1 Leader in outcomes management and measurement
   Allows for regular reporting on quality care, performance improvement and results for patients.

2 Organizational excellence
   Continued performance improvement on outcome data for all rehab patients.

3 Large patient database
   Experience in a variety of disciplines. Additionally, data is normalized against national averages for comparison purposes.

4 Excellence with clinical programs and measurement
   Consistently promotes and achieves functional improvements and overall wellness.

5 Maximize critical components in patient recovery
   Established protocols make the most of all elements of recovery.

6 Caregivers with expertise managing medically complex patients
   Skilled team that works together to treat patients with multiple medical issues and various clinical complexities.

7 State-of-the-art equipment
   Utilizes optimal equipment and modalities needed to treat a variety of conditions and impairments.

8 Interdisciplinary expertise to provide the best patient care
   Frequent team collaboration and assessment to develop the most appropriate plan of care. Includes a focus on early recognition of risk factors to help alleviate interruptions in patient care.

9 Specialized rehab therapies and programs
   Should include a wide range of therapy programs that address the many needs of patients/residents.

The Steps to Success
What to look for in a Rehab Provider

The following grid summarizes what you should look for in a rehab provider to maximize clinical outcomes for your patients. Working with the most skilled rehab provider will position you to best serve your patients.

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Importance of Measuring Clinical Outcomes

Clinical outcomes are valuable on several levels. They demonstrate the functional improvements of patients, and they also support quality 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 clinical outcomes in order to promote the best patient care possible.

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 rehab 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.
- 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 treatment; preventable secondary medical complications; unexpected mortality; rehospitalizations; and excessive program LOS and costs.

As a result, rehab providers should 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

Rehab 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
3. status of functional improvement at discharge

Points of comparison should be provided.

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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 transitional care hospitals, nursing and rehabilitation centers, inpatient acute rehab units, independent rehabilitation facilities and hospice and home care locations.

Our vast network enables your patients to access best practices in rehabilitation therapies. 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.

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About Kindred Nursing and Rehabilitation Centers

Kindred Healthcare is one of the premier providers of rehabilitation services and post-acute care in the country. From specialized short-term rehab to long-term care, Kindred’s Nursing and Rehabilitation Centers provide a full range of medical and social services to treat and support each of our patients and residents. Many of our patients go home each year, and for those who are unable to return home, we provide safe, compassionate care in an environment that fosters independence and dignity. Kindred Healthcare operates 98 nursing centers and six assisted living facilities across the country. As a result of our quality care and services, over 95% of our nursing and rehabilitation centers have received Quality Awards from the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living.