



## **The Role of Rehabilitation in Developing Acute and Post-Acute Strategic Partnerships**

Amidst the ever-changing landscape of healthcare reform, post-acute care providers are wisely becoming more strategic about forming partnerships with their community of referring hospitals, along with other post acute care (PAC) providers. This collaboration is critical for ensuring the continuum of care. Moreover, providers must demonstrate a distinct value proposition for those hospitals looking to form Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs). Building these relationships requires short-term and long term strategic development planning and initiatives that involve all levels of care, inclusive of a facility's Rehabilitation Team. Providers must leverage a robust Rehabilitation Department to help drive quality integration with referring hospitals and physician groups.

The complexities of providing rehab services cannot be overstated; reimbursement, compliance and operational challenges can be daunting for many providers. However, by offering unique, strategically positioned rehab services, you can create partnership opportunities with referring hospitals that will enhance census development efforts and ultimately help secure alliances with potential ACOs in the future.

### **Use of Therapy Technology Solutions**

For those hospitals looking to create partnerships and form ACOs, it is important to be able to demonstrate the efficacy of therapy treatment provided at your facility and the quality of care.

A therapy department that captures clinical outcomes -- such as improvements in function, pain management, treatment intensity and patient satisfaction -- has the advantage of leveraging these metrics in support of census development initiatives. This requires the use of sophisticated therapy software systems, as well as a therapy team that is well-prepared to monitor and manage clinical outcome measures.

A sophisticated therapy operation will also help manage pre & post op therapy for ambulatory surgery & inpatient surgery patients, thus facilitating more effective movement through the acute DRG, with quicker pre-approval for HMO patients for the next level of care. Rehab involvement in interdisciplinary discharge planning will help manage the flow of patients into the most appropriate post-acute care -- acute rehab, subacute rehab, outpatient, or home health.

## **Rehab's Role in Mitigating Re-Hospitalization Rates**

Hospitals are incentivized to pay attention to the quality of care provided by their PAC providers so as to protect themselves from reimbursement penalties as well as to optimize the care for patients across the continuum.

Your therapy department is in a unique position to help prevent avoidable hospital re-admissions at your facility. Since the therapy team works so closely and consistently with your residents, rehab managers and staff must be considered part of interdisciplinary team responsible for monitoring patient status and identifying patients at risk to return to the hospital. Specifically, your rehab team should:

- Closely monitor & communicate key vital signs for all patients on caseload (not just cardiac) during varying levels of rehab clinic activities to help nursing respond to medical changes before escalation.
- Constant communication should occur with nursing regarding patient status throughout the 24/7 cycle so that rehab will recognize medical status changes during clinic time relative to current baseline.
- Providing therapy on the units and contributing to ongoing CNA & nursing training will assure that nursing and therapy are always in sync.
- Comprehensive caregiver training – assuring all who need training are trained, all that needs to be trained is covered, and all that is covered is demonstrated back at a competent level - will assure that families are truly ready to take their loved ones home and avoid post-discharge re-hospitalization.

## **Compliance Watchdogs**

In addition to helping to prevent unnecessary re-hospitalizations, your Rehab team must be well-prepared to also help manage the risk associated with compliance. As experts in regulatory standards, compliance and reimbursement strategies, the therapy team should be able to provide adequate training and conduct regular audits to ensure standards are met and your facility has a strong foundation to weather any regulatory oversight.

By fortifying documentation and reimbursement practices, and ensuring clinical applications are provided with integrity, only then can your therapy team can build exceptional services that result in excellent outcomes.