



Rehabilitation Services: Rx for the Most Expensive Medical Conditions

Your top employee has just had a heart attack. The good news is that he should be able to return to work within a few months. The bad news is that you'll have to find a temporary replacement and probably face an increase in your health insurance renewal premium.

Heart disease and other chronic conditions are costing Americans billions more than they did 20 years ago, according to a recent *Health Affairs* study, which found that 15 conditions accounted for 56 percent of the \$200 billion rise in healthcare spending between 1987 and 2000.

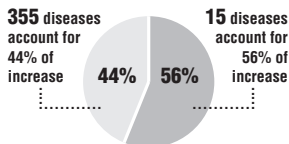
than ever for them to find ways to reduce employee medical expenses. One strategy for employers is to utilize outpatient rehabilitation services to maintain the health and productivity of their employees. Physical and occupational therapists help patients recover from serious illnesses, regain strength, and return to work. Providing rehabilitation therapy soon after surgery helps patients become ambulatory to avoid further complications. Therapists also educate patients with chronic conditions on how to adapt to their limitations, maximize their efficiency at work, and achieve a healthy lifestyle.

Here's a look at some of the ways rehabilitation helps those afflicted with the top five conditions:

The Costliest Maladies

Between 1987 and 2000, health care spending rose from \$429 billion to \$628 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars, but a small number of diseases accounted for more than half of the increase.

Percent of health care cost increase from 1987 to 2000 attributed to specific diseases.



Ranked by money spent 2000

1. Heart disease
2. Pulmonary conditions
3. Mental disorders
4. Cancer
5. Hypertension
6. Trauma
7. Cerebrovascular disease
8. Arthritis
9. Diabetes
10. Back problems
11. Skin disorders
12. Pneumonia
13. Infectious disease
14. Endocrine disorders
15. Kidney disease

SOURCE: Health Affairs

THE WASHINGTON POST

The top five conditions responsible for one-third of the increase were: heart disease, pulmonary conditions, mental disorders, cancer and hypertension. Individuals with such conditions use significantly more health services than the average person—more hospital stays, more prescription drugs, and more doctor visits—and that means higher medical costs for their employers.

With employers facing continued double-digit increases in health care costs in 2005, it will be more important

1. Heart disease. Heart attack survivors are at increased risk for recurrent heart attacks, cardiovascular complications, and sudden cardiac death, but those who participate in cardiac rehabilitation have improved survival rates. Cardiac rehabilitation helps heart attack survivors rebuild their cardiovascular condition with an aerobic regimen to encourage the arteries to become more elastic and expand easily.

2. Pulmonary conditions. Patients with emphysema or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or those who have inhaled asbestos or other pollutants that cause restricted breathing, gain strength through the use of breathing re-training techniques.

3. Mental disorders. Physical therapists who specialize in fitness and who use yoga, Pilates, and Tai Chi in their practices say their patients experience—along with increased strength and flexibility—a better overall feeling of well being. Those suffering from depression,

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5. Hypertension. One in every four adults suffers from hypertension—high blood pressure—the leading cause of stroke. Numerous studies have shown that the more physical activity a person does, the lower the risk of stroke. However, unsupervised exercise can lead to severe problems in people with unrecognized hypertension, often called “the silent killer.” Physical therapists who run wellness programs understand not only the importance of supervised exercise, but also the necessity to screen for and control hypertension when they consult with the patient’s physician about an appropriate exercise program.

4. Cancer. Cancer patients are often left debilitated and possibly disabled after cancer treatments. Physical therapists work with patients to decrease fatigue, nausea, and pain and to improve strength, endurance, general mobility and quality of life. They help patients learn how to relax, conserve energy, and manage stress.

anxiety, and stress find their symptoms improve with physical activity because serotonin levels increase through exercise.

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