

## Outcomes matter: Measure your performance and your patient recovery rates against your colleagues'

Stay ahead of the pack and start measuring patient outcomes today. Follow the initiative taken by Calabasas, CA-based PTPN, Inc., a national network of independent rehabilitation providers, by implementing an outcome measurement program that will benefit you, your practice, and your patients.

When pay for performance (P4P) becomes a reality, therapists who are accustomed to measuring and tracking patient outcomes will have an advantage over rehab providers who are waiting to see what will happen.

### Outcome initiative kickoff

Two years ago, PTPN made a decision to embark on a national outcomes initiative program. After sifting through different vendor proposals, PTPN decided that Focus on Therapeutic Outcomes, Inc. (FOTO), an independent company that measures outpatient outcomes, was the best fit.

PTPN's goal is for all of its 4,000 PTs, OTs, and SLPs in 23 states to participate in this initiative. This is a state-by-state rollout with some states such as Louisiana and Arizona having been on board for almost a year, whereas California and Colorado started the program in May. Measuring outcomes helps therapists evaluate themselves and to see whether they are on par nationally, says **Judy Holder**, manager of provider relations at FOTO, Inc., in Knoxville, TN.

The purpose of measuring outcomes is to determine a patient's function before, during, and after his or her treatment, says **Michael Weinper, PT, MPH**, president and CEO of PTPN.

These data are then compared against national benchmarks so PTPN and its therapists can see how they compare to others in the profession.

### Are you a quality therapist?

Many therapists believe that they provide quality services, but when asked whether they can prove it, many

can't, says Weinper. In reality, no therapist is good at everything. Tracking outcomes gives an opportunity to see how he or she ranks. The downside is for therapists who thought they were good and discover through the outcomes process that, in reality, their ability to treat patients isn't as successful as once thought.

But this isn't always a negative. Measuring outcomes provides therapists with an opportunity to see where their own strengths and weaknesses lie.

For example, if a therapist sees a lot of extremity patients but doesn't score high on outcomes for those patients, there is the option to go back to school or take a course and learn how to improve. PTPN takes the data to identify leaders, determines what they do differently, and then shares that information with other therapists, explains Weinper.

PTPN is the first network in the country to mandate providers to measure patient outcomes, says Weinper. Some therapists showed resistance to the program stating they didn't have time or resources. But once they got past those insecurities, they started to get a better sense of how measuring outcomes will only benefit them.

### Reimbursement and outcome measures

Measuring outcomes is not intended to punish therapists who rank poorly; rather its purpose is to help them, says Weinper. Right now the program is in its infancy, and PTPN is not as concerned with the data as it is with getting every therapist on board. PTPN is examining the results gathered to date, but Weinper points out that the more data collected, the more validity behind the data.

### Questions? Comments? Ideas?

Contact Associate Editor **Adrienne Trivers**

Telephone **781/639-1872, Ext. 3207**

E-mail **[atrivers@hcpro.com](mailto:atrivers@hcpro.com)**

Hopefully down the road P4P will take effect, and measuring outcomes now will pay off later. The hope is to achieve higher reimbursement rates, better efficiency, and patient improvement in fewer visits, he says.

### The patient's involvement

Measuring patient outcomes requires both the patient and the therapist to make adjustments, says Weinper.

It's a learning process for some patients to take a query when starting a rehabilitation program, he notes. But before a patient's initial evaluation, he or she must fill out a health survey questionnaire. This query helps determine the general wellness of a patient. It also provides insight to how ill or well the patient perceives himself or herself to be.

This health survey will help you to answer the following questions about the condition of the patient:

- ▶ How does the injury or illness limit the patient's daily functions?
- ▶ How has the patient's ability to function improved with treatment?
- ▶ What is the patient's health background?
- ▶ What is the patient's personal health status?

It's too early to tell how the program is doing, but patients and therapists are expressing their satisfaction with it thus far, says Weinper.

Plus the program generates a predictor report about how long a patient's treatment might last and in how many visits.

To determine this, the patient's responses to the health survey are compared to others with the same ailments and similar health backgrounds.

### Starting an outcome measurement program

Launching an outcome measurement program now will help you stay ahead of the curve and prepare for P4P, says Holder.

Therapists who want to measure patient outcomes need to first plan out a process. Holder recommends asking the following questions to gauge where you're at and where you want to go:

- ▶ Will you provide a computer-based or a written survey?
- ▶ What program will you use?
- ▶ Who is responsible for setting this up and training staff members?
- ▶ What will you do with the collected data? ■

### Steps to gathering patient data

PTPN, Inc.'s outcomes program began when **Michael Weinper, PT, MPH**, president and CEO of the Calabasa, CA-based company, and the rest of the organization's management team and regional executives decided that the best way to track patient outcomes is to set up a mandatory tracking program. The following steps are an outline of what PTPN's outcomes program entails:

**1.** Patients complete a computerized or paper survey at intake indicating how their condition is affecting their daily functioning.

**2.** Using a database of 2 million current rehab cases, the system compares that patient to similar patients, based on more than 10 risk-adjustment factors, including age, health status, and acuity.

Then the database predicts how much functional improvement that patient is likely to achieve and over how

many visits. The patient takes the functional status survey again at discharge to determine how much improvement was actually achieved over the course of treatment.

That discharge survey also includes questions that measure patient satisfaction. The patient may also take the survey at points during treatment to measure incremental progress.

**3.** Based on the data collected, PTPN providers are compared to national benchmarks in provider efficiency.

**4.** The data may be used to:

- Demonstrate providers' superiority against national benchmarks
- Determine the most effective practice patterns
- Evaluate and reward provider performance
- Enhance payers' case management and authorization processes