

There's no denying that changing trends are redefining health care as we know it, offering new opportunities to collaborate across medical disciplines and systems. Instead of being competitors, health care professionals can work together to achieve better care and outcomes for the people we serve.

The creation of an integrated therapy services model is part of this trend. Integrated therapy services can be instrumental in achieving the Triple Aim, first articulated by Donald Berwick, MD, chief executive officer of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. The Triple Aim is at the core of what we hope to achieve in health care today:

- Improving the individual's experience of care, including quality and satisfaction
- Improving the health of our population
- Reducing the per capita cost of health care

# The integrated therapy model

## *A response to changing trends in health care*

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### Care integration and the Triple Aim

In achieving the Triple Aim, the key is to reduce costs without sacrificing the quality of patient care. That is where an integrated system can be most helpful.

*Improving individuals' experience of care* can occur only when the entire care team listens to the person who is receiving care. Open discussion of what is best for the patient must include active participation by the patient. Care and treatment discussions should be guided by the patient's desires (not our own) and should include perspectives from all

members of the health care team.

When doctors, nurses, therapists, and other health care professionals work as an integrated team, they have access to a broad variety of services and do not have to send patients outside the system to get what they need. This approach allows professionals to provide the most efficient care and achieve better outcomes.

Unfortunately, therapy has too often been perceived as separate from other aspects of treatment, leaving therapists in the dark about the objectives and decision-making process of other medical care providers. When therapists are sidelined, the quality of care suffers.

For example, if a physical therapist is not consulted about a patient who is extremely weak due to illness, the wrong decision may be made about whether the patient can function well enough to return home. If a speech pathologist is not consulted when a patient's diet is being upgraded, the chances for silent aspiration may be overlooked. This could lead to unnecessary aspiration pneumonia. On the other hand, when therapists are integrated into the total health care solution, better care and outcomes can result.

An integrated therapy service model can also contribute to *improving the health of populations*. Increasingly, health care leaders are recognizing the importance of being proactive in developing wellness and fitness plans for clinics, hospitals, and care communities. By building participants' strength and endurance, these plans can help residents, patients, and community members prevent future health problems.

Therapists can also work

with other health care professionals to educate people to live healthier lives. For example, Centrex Rehab, a therapy company, includes a division that helps people stay in their homes longer and stay safer through home modifications, such as installing railings or widening doorways. These educational efforts are extended through community-wide projects and training programs. The more people we reach, the more we can improve the health of populations.

*Reducing the per capita cost of health care* can be achieved in these ways through integrated models of care:

- Integrated models of preventive health and wellness can result in savings by building a stronger, more independent population through collaborative efforts.
- Offering health education and home modifications can help people live in their homes longer, improving the quality of their lives at less cost to the community.

We also must continue to challenge ourselves to redefine care. For example, an integrated model that maintains consistent outcomes and adopts a creative approach to who provides treatment, how it is delivered, and the duration of intense treatment can yield substantial savings to practitioners.

### Integration is crucial to quality outcomes

Moving toward more interactive, coordinated models of care means connecting care communities with clinics, therapy centers, house calls, and care networks such as accountable care organizations. This model helps not only individuals who receive care, but providers as well.

Providers are well aware that under new federal rules for Medicare/ Medicaid, hospital readmissions can result in financial penalties. When therapists and physicians are part of the same integrated system, rehospitalizations are much more preventable and physicians can be confident

that the organization's service level, care, and focus are working. Integrated systems can also make for smoother billing, payments, and reimbursements, as care is coordinated through cooperating partners with the same objective. Similarly, in this era of increased regulations and compliance requirements, health care services that are part of an integrated system will view compliance and regulatory requirements as of the utmost importance.

### **A new approach to health for older adults**

Every part of the Triple Aim is relevant to older generations. Census figures show that the fastest-growing age group in the U.S. consists of people aged 75 and older. By 2030, this group will number 33 million people—9 percent of our population—and the number of Minnesotans aged 85 and older will increase by 50 percent.

Older adults have unique needs and often have multiple medical conditions. Therefore, it is highly advantageous for them to have access to an integrated therapy service model with a range of options so they do not have to use multiple treatment providers. In addition, integrating therapy services with medical care allows the entire health care team to discuss medications and conditions to be sure all the pieces of a care plan fit together.

Centrex Rehab has developed an integrative approach to providing care. A physical therapist works with local hospitals to provide pre-operative education to individuals going through joint replacement surgery. Meeting a therapist before surgery enables patients who are admitted to transitional care settings after surgery to become more comfortable with their therapists.

When patients return home, the company subcontracts with a home care provider to allow for a smooth transition. Physicians say they appreciate the steady stream of communication, all from the same therapist. Patients are also much more comfortable going

through two transitional periods knowing the same therapist

## *When therapists are integrated into the total health care solution, better care and outcomes can result.*

will be providing their care. This is especially important for older patients who tend to be more anxious about abrupt changes, as anxiety can disrupt recovery.

Advantages of integrated systems for physicians include better communication and coordination, supporting better outcomes. As new models of care emerge, outcome-based mechanisms for compensation are sure to be used. We now have before us the opportunity to see whether integrated systems will offer better results than traditional “siloes” care-delivery systems.

### **Integrated care: an example**

One example of the integrated system at Centrex Rehab involves its work in assisting Twin Cities Orthopedics' Excel program at York Gardens in Edina. The premise for this program is that when a healthy person needs a joint replacement, a physical therapist sees the patient to develop a pre-surgery fitness plan several weeks or months before the surgery.

On the day of surgery, the patient arrives with added strength and a high level of physical fitness that reduces problems after surgery. The procedure is completed at Twin Cities Orthopedics and after recovering for a few hours, the patient is transported with a nurse and medication to York Gardens.

Upon arrival, the patient is met by a physical therapist who provides treatment; the patient is up and walking by that afternoon or early evening. The next day, after two more sessions with a physical therapist and one with an occupational therapist, most patients are able to return home that evening.

All the health care staff involved in this program—from those who participate in the pre-surgery consultation to the

team that helps get the patient back home—feel a strong sense

of accomplishment and success. Patients tell us they feel strongly supported and appreciate the care they receive. The program has been so successful that Twin Cities Orthopedics plans to expand it to other locations in the metro area.

### **Laying the groundwork**

While integrated models are likely to play out differently in different situations, the core objective remains the same: achieving the Triple Aim. As organizations build partnerships, they will have new tools that enable them to improve the experience of care. Coordinating a system around all aspects of the Triple Aim has resulted in great success at Centrex Rehab

and other companies that use integrated care models.

What does “success” look like for us with these models?

- Pre-surgery strengthening protocols
- State-of-the-art surgery techniques
- Strict adherence to pain medication guidelines and intense therapy

Of course, the success of any model depends on excellent communication among an interdisciplinary team of professionals.

As we continue moving toward a new integrated model of care, we are laying the groundwork to achieve the Triple Aim in Minnesota while serving as a model to other systems nationwide. A new, cooperative approach to care is the key to a brighter future for health care delivery. 

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