

REHAB perspectives

SUMMER
2010



Plan for Success



**Manage
chronic
diseases**



**Invest in
Employees**

sponsored by
aegis 
therapies®



President's Message

Ultimately, everything Aegis Therapies does is patient-focused. We want to help our patients live the best life they can possibly live. We're constantly looking for ways to maximize each individual's potential and study the various components that come into play while we try to reach that rewarding goal. So it's no surprise that in this issue of *Rehab Perspectives*, we discuss disease management as part of the continuum of care and how a qualified workforce impacts the success of a healthcare facility or department. It's important for healthcare providers to acknowledge that we need both to achieve the right care in the proper time frame.



We invite you to explore the advantages of including disease management programs in your rehab therapy model to experience benefits such as better healthcare quality, lower financial cost, and increased patient satisfaction. Shockingly, about 58 million Americans live with some sort of chronic disease today, according to the Disease Management Association of America. To put things in perspective, the "Disease Management In The Care Continuum" article discusses findings of a study that followed progress of congestive heart failure patients enrolled in a disease management program, as well as how a co-morbidity such as diabetes may affect physical therapy. We also explore the continuum of care model as a holistic and comprehensive approach to treating patients, in addition to its impact on healthcare plans and providers.

Meanwhile, "A Qualified Workforce Pays Dividends" examines how such a staff can improve care, with a specific angle on rehabilitation therapies and real-world situations. From continuing education courses such as dementia management to good communication skills and relationship-building tactics in the field, you'll find something you can apply within your department or facility.

See what companies like Aegis Therapies are doing to keep employees empowered, encouraged and happy to be part of the Aegis team. As always, Aegis is proud to be your rehab resource. Enjoy your reading!

Martha Schram
President
Aegis Therapies

Contents



3 Disease Management In The Care Continuum

6 A Qualified Workforce Pays Dividends *Continuing education, open communication and outcomes tracking can help empower employees and improve patient care*

REHAB perspectives

For more information on these articles, contact AegisTherapies at:

Aegis Therapies
440 Wells Street, Suite # 200
Delafield, WI 53018
Toll Free: (877) 877-9889
Phone: (262) 646-1760
www.aegistherapies.com



Produced by *McKnight's Long-Term Care News*

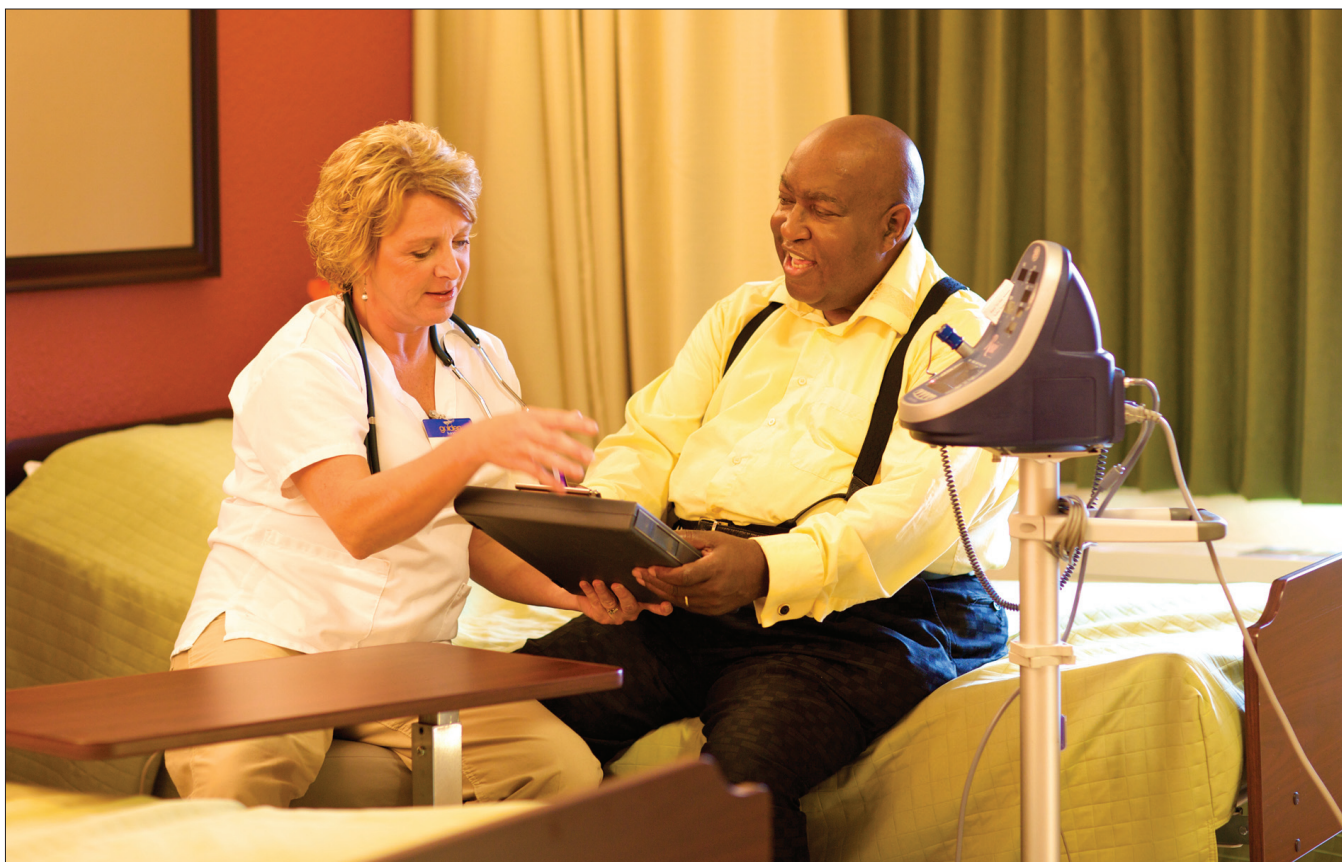
Mona Cohen, Writer

John O'Connor, Vice President, Associate Publisher/Editorial Director

Terry Rinella, Graphic Designer



Disease Management In The Care Continuum



According to the Disease Management Association of America (DMAA), disease and condition management improves health status, healthcare quality, patient and provider satisfaction, and financial outcomes for people suffering from chronic illnesses. Those conditions may include congestive heart failure, diabetes, coronary artery disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, end-stage renal disease, asthma, and obesity, among others.

The goal of disease management is to limit preventable events by ensuring that patients adhere to prescribed treatments and

Disease management aims to limit preventable events by helping patients adhere to prescribed treatments and adopt healthy lifestyle changes.

adopt healthy lifestyle changes. Thanks to this approach, patients with chronic diseases can expect a variety of positive results, including:

- Better clinical outcomes
- Improved function, leading to a better quality of life
- Lower healthcare costs



- Lower risk of hospitalization, surgery, and other invasive care
- Easier access to care support services

DMAA reports positive results from a study that followed the progress of congestive heart failure patients who were enrolled in a disease management program.

The program was made up of several components, including patient education, interactive vital sign monitoring, nurse support, and physician intervention. The clinical results were measured 12 months later with positive results, including an 18 percent reduction in inpatient days, a 36 percent reduction in inpatient admissions, a 31 percent decrease in emergency room visits, and a 20 percent decline in average length of hospital stays. Patient satisfaction surveys showed a 16 percent improvement. Additionally, financial savings for the group included a 54 percent drop in disease specific claims and a 42 percent average reduction in all insurance claims.

According to the DMAA, about 58 million Americans live with some sort of chronic disease. With disease and condition management, healthcare providers in the physical therapy community can play an important role in improving their patients' lives as well reducing healthcare costs.

The continuum of care

The Aegis services offered as part of individualized care plans take into account patients' changing needs and abilities. The best plans offer a holistic and comprehensive approach that includes evaluation, treatment frequency and progress notes, and follow-up by physicians, nurses, therapists, patients, and caregivers. The care plan is constantly reviewed and modified as needed because patients may face setbacks or may progress faster than anticipated.

This "plan of action" also includes educating patients. Along with discussing the positive outcomes anticipated from treatment, therapists assigned to patients discuss what may happen should patients decide not to continue treatment. The therapists help patients understand what may happen if the original injury or condition is not taken care of properly. For example, an injury such as a slipped disk may lead to far worse complications if not treated correctly. "Patient education empowers both the patient and the therapist," says Donna Diedrich, Regional Director of Clinical Services at Aegis Therapies.

However, the continuum of care and services is not linear. Patients don't have to complete one part of their treatment in order to move on to the next. If someone fractured their ankle and found themselves in a cast for example, their physician most likely would advise them not to put any weight on the joint for a while. The patient then would have to learn how to use an adaptive device like crutches or a walker and learn new walking patterns while working on balance in therapy. The patient might even have to learn how to use a wheelchair. As part of their future rehabilitation, the patient also would have to restore strength and motion to the ankle, adding another component to their overall treatment. Ultimately, the continuum of care answers the question, "How, at any given time in the recovery process, can a patient function at his or her maximum potential?"



In addition to a new injury, co-morbidities may substantially affect the type of therapy a patient needs, as well as the success of their treatment.

Aegis therapists work together with patients and their physicians to create the best plan of care that fits patients' specific needs, with the understanding that it is crucial that patients are motivated to actively participate in their treatment. Patients agree. "In my 20-odd years of using this facility, I have found one basic, fundamental fact: It's a team operation. You will progress to the degree of your own efforts and those of your therapist," says Elizabeth Christie, a patient of the Orthopedic Center of Excellence at Golden LivingCenter - Foley, in Alabama.

The model of care used by Aegis therapists might include a variety of treatment approaches, such as restoration of a skill or compensatory techniques to accommodate a temporary restriction. The plan also may include adaptive approaches (such as adding a ramp) and environmental safety improvements (such as rearranging a patient's furniture in his or her home) to facilitate safe mobility.

The best therapists look at the entire picture to determine realistic short-term and long-term goals. There are many factors taken into account to formulate these goals and the best possible treatment focus within the continuum of care.

Co-morbidity is another factor that substantially affects the treatment focus. A patient's health conditions — in addition to a new injury — may affect the type of therapy needed, their progress, and the ultimate success of their treatment. "If an 80-year-old man has hypertension or high cholesterol in addition to a recent



Disease management will be even more important as the Medicare and Medicaid programs move forward with implementing provisions of the health reform law.

injury, his physical therapy will be quite different than another 80-year-old patient with the same recent injury. Two patients are never alike; therapy is very individualized,” says Diedrich. And if the co-morbidity is a progressive neurological condition such as Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s disease, it is even more crucial to build a customized plan of treatment.

Therapy and diabetes

Therapy is an evidence-based practice at Aegis. Effective treatments and techniques have been questioned and proven, observed and analyzed, and recorded. There are clinical guidelines therapists follow and literature they can reference. “Research evidence is supplemented when each therapist brings their previous experience to the table,” says Diedrich. Effective therapists intuitively know that patients don’t have to passively accept pain but instead can actively help manage it with therapy techniques. Research evidence helps guide therapists to the most effective approaches.

Besides general training, skilled therapists also should have knowledge about specific diseases, including type 1 and type 2 diabetes mellitus and gestational diabetes. According to the American Diabetes Association, there are 23.6 million children and adults living with diabetes in the United States. Of these, an estimated 17.9 million have been diagnosed, while 5.7 million are unaware that they have the disease. Diabetes can result in numerous complications, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, kidney disease, and ulcers, to name a few.

Physical therapists can help individuals with diabetes if they experience muscle soreness, numbness or a tingling sensation in their feet, and pain or limping when walking. An occupational therapist also can help a patient with diabetes with adaptive techniques and equipment to compensate for neuropathy and decreased sensation in hands and feet. Patients typically are given “homework” or home programs to complete their daily fitness regimen goals.

Healthcare plans and providers

According to the DMAA, more than 100 million Americans have at least one chronic illness. Heart disease, diabetes, and asthma are now the leading causes of illness in the United States and consume a substantial portion of healthcare resources. John Perticone, Division Director of Managed Care for Golden Living, says, “Five percent of Americans who are insured today account for about half of the medical costs incurred by health insurance plans.”

Disease management is a way to address the healthcare needs of that group of beneficiaries by applying best practices to improve patient care outcomes. Inherent in applying these best practices is the intent of caring for patients in the most effective manner to meet their needs regardless of the setting. Best practices can help keep these patients in the least costly environment while giving them the best possible quality of care and outcomes. These are three components that are integral to successful disease management.

To create these three components, it is imperative that health plans work with a range of healthcare providers, from acute and sub-acute hospitals to inpatient rehab hospitals, long-term acute care and assisted living facilities, home care providers, and others. Having the necessary range of providers available will enable the health plan to assure patients that their needs are being met in an appropriate, effective, and timely manner. This networking can be achieved through contracts and various arrangements with providers. Innovation and flexibility are key to a successful disease management program.

By working together, health plans and providers can offer patients the right treatment — at the right time and in the right place. This team-based approach makes a difference not only for patients, but also for their families and caregivers.

Disease management will take on additional importance as the Medicare and Medicaid programs move forward with implementing provisions under the newly enacted health reform law, the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act” (P.L. 111-148). There are a number of provisions pertaining to the Medicare and Medicaid programs that place new emphasis on integrating patient care among providers as well as “bundling” payments for their care. While initially some of these provisions will be developed as pilot and demonstration projects, it is clear they will be given a high priority as a means to increase the efficiency of delivering care while improving the quality of patient care outcomes.

With so many benefits — for the patient, providers, and health plans — coming from the integration of healthcare services through disease management, it’s no wonder disease management is viewed as an integral part of our future healthcare system. ■



A Qualified Workforce Pays Dividends

Continuing education, open communication, and outcomes tracking can help empower employees and improve patient care



If learning is growing and knowledge is power, then a qualified, stable workforce is unstoppable. An educated, well-trained, and skilled staff allows a business to flourish, evolve, and operate at its optimum capacity. In turn, businesses benefit from the harmony and fluidity of the operation. This is true in any field and it's certainly true in healthcare.

“By ensuring our staff has the most up-to-date clinical knowledge, we deliver excellent therapy services that help improve patients’ lives,” says Angela Edney, Regional Director of Clinical Services at Aegis Therapies. She adds, “Our therapists excel in a host of different settings, from long-term care facilities, home health agencies, and assisted living facilities, to school systems and outpatient clinics. So it’s important that they are equipped with real-world skills.”

Satisfied employees are more likely to work hard for their employer, the SNF, and their patients.

Continuing education

In addition to meeting the needs of customers such as skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) and patients, healthcare providers have to keep up to date with ever-changing research findings in order to be successful and remain competitive. One way to ensure a qualified workforce is to significantly focus on training and continuing education. Certifications in school are only the beginning and serve as the foundation of an educational journey.

Aegis Therapies, for example, offers a range of in-person courses, boot camps, continuing education units (CEUs), and online classes



to help its therapists better meet patients' special needs. For example, if a patient not only has a broken ankle but also suffers from the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, knowing the right exercises to treat the ankle injury isn't enough. The therapist also has to know how to react and deal with the effects of dementia. "Aegis Therapies' classes help therapists build knowledge in balance and fall prevention, complex disease management, seating and positioning, and dementia management, among other areas," says Edney. The continuing education renders therapists more confident of and more comfortable in their decisions. They can apply the lessons learned and see the results of that extra knowledge unfold right before their eyes. This helps them see and believe that they made a difference in a patient's life.

Open communication

For teamwork to flow, a team must have good and open communication. In the therapy arena, this team includes the therapists themselves as well as the SNF's physicians, nurses, social workers, patients, and families or caregivers. This communication between the key players in a patient's support system is essential for good outcomes. It allows the team to take a proactive approach rather than a reactive one. For example, if a therapist notices that a certain patient is walking slightly differently, he or she should feel comfortable enough and encouraged to report this valuable information to the SNF's clinicians. The therapist should know that the feedback won't fall onto deaf ears and will be taken seriously.

Communication also has an impact at the facility level. To ensure quality and consistency, it is important to have procedures and systems in place in any facility. With good communication, those systems can be learned and respected by both in-house and contractual staff. To communicate effectively, each department must commit to accurate reporting. The professional healthcare team should take proper notes, fill out progress reports, track due dates, sign the plan of care on time, follow up with regulatory agencies, and so on.

Tracking clinical outcomes

Healthcare providers can track and monitor the progress of their staff in conjunction with the progress of their patients. Often, a better workforce means better clinical outcomes. Aegis Therapies trains its staff on outcomes management to assess what they do well and identify areas for improvement. "Our therapists are continually improving themselves and changing the way they work to meet patients' demands and needs," says Edney.

Tracking and monitoring specific components within the system may result in fewer issues from a survey standpoint. Documenting outcomes also adds to a healthcare company's credibility among both referral sources (such as hospitals and physicians) and potential employees (such as recent graduates).

Better retention

Access to continuing education, good communication, and outcomes data are tools that empower employees and can help them feel that they have the right tools to become experts in their field. Employees



Staff education — whether online or through another mechanism — is one of the best ways to ensure that your staff is knowledgeable and well trained.

who are satisfied with their employers naturally become more likely to do a better job, excel, and work hard for their employer, the SNF, and their patients. A satisfied employee also will go above and beyond his or her assigned responsibilities. If every individual performs at that level, the team and the organization as a whole excel. This can lead to more business, credibility, profit, and success. It also empowers the employee because he or she can literally see how the tools they are offered translate into helping patients. Ultimately, making a positive difference in patients' lives is why many employees choose healthcare careers.

According to Kay McCall, Vice President of Recruitment for Aegis Therapies, "Aegis managers receive ongoing training in leadership development. Topics covered include conflict management, holding people accountable, delegation, and interviewing skills." Additionally, Aegis has retention plans in place to determine what makes people stay in the organization and why they leave. There are awards to recognize people in various departments within Aegis for accomplishments such as excellent customer service skills and excellent patient care, among others. "The awards allow individuals who are role models to be recognized not only by Aegis but also by their peers — people they themselves look up to. To be appreciated can be quite powerful and encouraging," says Amanda Glazer, Director of Recruitment at Aegis Therapies.

Giving a voice to employees also is a crucial part of developing a stable and qualified team. It assures employees that their feedback is valued. In the case of Aegis Therapies, employees are surveyed once a year on satisfaction and engagement. The surveys help managers and leadership conceptualize a better retention plan.

Employees are at the heart of any business, and in the field of healthcare, this is even more apparent, since patients are trusting caregivers with their health and well being.

By addressing retention proactively, healthcare providers can prevent employee dissatisfaction and focus more on their core business of improving lives. ■

Aegis for living.
Aegis for *life.*



Let Aegis Therapies help your patients
get back to living the life they love.

877-877-9889

www.aegistherapies.com

aegis 
therapies®

Contract Therapy • Acute Rehab • Wellness • Home Health • Outpatient Services

Aegis Therapies welcomes all persons in need of its services and does not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, gender, sexual orientation or source of payment. ATS-05548-10