

IALCP ARTICLE: OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

Outcome measurement is a process by which a professional or organization uses an evaluation tool to quantitatively measure customer satisfaction and identify benefits with services provided. It is this ongoing collection of feedback which promotes adjustment, evaluation, and fine tuning of the service that allows for service improve.

The importance and value of outcome measurement has become most evident across all spectrums of professional organizations within the last decade. (Matthews, 2000). A comprehensive literature review reveals that there is some method and level of outcome measurement, management, and evaluation in all professional sectors. (Matthews, 2000). Most evident is the presence of outcome measurement systems in the health care industry. (Matthews, 2000). “Outcome management increases the potential of organizations to achieve competitive leverage, quality patient care, and efficient operations through effectively collecting and interpreting information. This ability will become increasingly important in the future as the cost of care will certainly rise and the competition for revenues increase.” (cited in Matthews, 2000, p. 55).

Organizations use outcomes management, data collection tools, and data resources to gather precise information able to validate the importance of a particular service or program. Outcome measurement provides a wealth of knowledge that should ultimately feed valuable information back into the program or services in order to provide continuous improvement and increased effectiveness of the service or product. While outcome evaluation analyzes the effectiveness of an activity or process, it also can improve delivery mechanisms by making them more efficient and less costly. It is also a measurement tool which allows a user to identify strengths and weaknesses, produce data, and verify results. These data may then be used for public relations and promoting services. A professional might also employ the data to compare programs to decide which should be retained and to identify effective programs for duplication elsewhere.

It is important to recognize the value of the research, support, and organizational commitment required to plan and implement an effective outcomes management program. To facilitate progression towards an integrated outcomes information management system, one must be aware of emerging outcomes measurement; be proactive in integrating existing measurements with new measurements; and be sure that the information is precise, accurate, valid, and relevant to the organizations operations. In order for any business or organization to remain successful within our current high tech, information seeking society, the business must be able to clearly identify and document the value of the service or product which they provide.

Outcome Measurement and Rehabilitation:

Rehabilitation nursing continues to evolve as a specialty practice within the nursing profession. One particular role or niche that is a perfect match to the unique skills and knowledge of the rehabilitation nurse is that of the Rehabilitation Consultant/Life Care Planner. Rehabilitation nurses have traditionally played a fundamental role in identifying appropriate services and resources for individuals with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. The identification of appropriate resources and coordination of care for the individual with a disability is paramount in facilitating an improved quality of life. Within all areas of health care, particularly within rehabilitation, the importance of tracking vital patient information for outcomes measurement continues to influence the delivery of care and services. The same should be true for the service of life care planning.

Nursing Consultation Services, Ltd., (NCS) is an independent nursing practice which provides a variety of services including life care planning. There is a definitive process which guides the development of the life care plan. This process begins with general discussion regarding the nature of the disability or chronic illness of the individual for whom the life care plan is intended. All pertinent medical, academic and/or vocational records are reviewed and incorporated within the LCP. A comprehensive evaluation of the individual's status according to NANDA approved Nursing Diagnoses is then completed. Communication (written and/or verbal) with all treating professionals is attempted in effort to ascertain their recommendations in relation to their

specialty. The patient information and components of the life care plan are thoroughly evaluated to ensure focus on prevention of disability complications and outline expectations of disability management over the life span. Throughout the development of the life care plan, identifying the need for other professional evaluations and/or referrals for services, accessing equipment, and outlining appropriate costs contributes to greater quality and satisfaction. This comprehensive approach in preparation of the LCP yields benefit to the client, the recipient of the LCP, and the rehabilitation professional. At the completion of the LCP process, the client is requested to complete the outcome measurement tool which accompanies the report. In addition, the client is again contacted in an effort to determine if the LCP has met their needs. This provides additional opportunity for open discussion regarding questions or concerns in relation to the LCP.

Over the past six years at Nursing Consultation Services, Ltd. we have developed an outcome measurement system for evaluation of the life care planning process. We use this system to elicit feedback from those for whom the life care plan was prepared and from third parties including those client's legal representatives and insurance companies. The outcome measurement system gathers input on a regular basis through the use of customer satisfaction surveys, questionnaires, ongoing informal inquiry, and other forms of communication. The collection of this information is vital to evaluating and insuring that our services are meeting the needs and expectations of clients and their families. Consumers have a definitive role in the planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of the services received. Responses from the outcome surveys are incorporated into our practice. The information obtained through the use of this process continues to be a prime consideration in the ongoing strategic planning process which guides the practice.

We currently prepare 50-70 new LCP's annually, revise an equal quantity, and prepare petitions of care

for special needs trusts. Our outcome measurement system surveys our clients as to the effectiveness of our LCP's, our timeliness to complete LCP's, and overall satisfaction with the end product for their purposes. Once the LCP is implemented and service coordination has been initiated, a six month is used to determine patient and/or family satisfaction with services provided. In addition, an annual satisfaction survey is utilized while services are being provided.

A literature search revealed that there are presently no outcomes measurement systems available specifically for the Life Care Planning process. Our questionnaires were specifically designed to evaluate whether the Life Care Planning process was meeting the needs of our clients. The advantages of questionnaires are that they can be non-threatening, completely anonymous, inexpensive to administer, and easy to compare and analyze. A self addressed stamped enveloped is included with the survey for the client's convenience. The disadvantage to questionnaires is that they can be impersonal and can be set aside and not returned. The objective of the questionnaires is to gather information to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the services provided. This is accomplished in the form of quantitative (ratings, rankings) and qualitative (written commentary) information. The results are then tabulated, included in a report for internal use to develop program recommendations, and shared with different groups including present and future clients.

When developing a survey, be sure you are clear of what input you are requesting and how that information will be utilized. This will provide focus on what information you need and will affect what questions will be listed. Avoid wording that may influence the respondent to answer a certain way so as to not bias the responses. Surveys need to include a brief explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire, clear explanation of how to complete the questionnaire, and directions about where to return the completed questionnaire. Avoid including too many questions because this may discourage potential respondents from completing the questionnaire. Check lists can lessen the time required to complete the survey but must be carefully phrased to elicit the information you require.

Purpose of NCS Outcome Measurement System for Life Care Planning

1. Provide opportunity for clients and families to communicate concerns.
2. Provide clients and families with comprehensive care and control over life care management experiences.
3. Ensure services provided are meeting the needs of external clients, officers of the court, trustees and insurers.
4. Provide an opportunity for evaluation of the efficiency/effectiveness/progress performance through the eyes of its consumers.
5. Improve the quality of life for clients and families.
6. Communicate to internal staff, clients and families in a format that recognizes the value of input.
7. Encourage continued participation and incorporate outcome data in a strategic plan.
8. Monitor internal organization efficiency measures.

Process: Survey Procedure:

1. Surveys are sent to the requestor with the final copy of the LCP on a continual basis throughout the year.
2. Questionnaires are sent to families receiving case management or care coordination services on an annual basis.
3. Survey sent annually to the individual with the fiduciary responsibility.
4. Survey format and content is reviewed annually for relevancy/need for addition/deletion of measurements based on input from staff and clients and families.
5. Organizational efficiency measures are monitored quarterly to provide data for strategic planning.
6. Life care coordinator is responsible to communicate to administrative assistant frequency of survey distribution based on acuity of clients and families, frequency of treatments, team meetings and identified family needs.
7. Progress measures are documented for clients and families who receive services within program for six months or when approval from funding is secured on a semiannual basis.

8. Goals are reviewed on a semiannual basis for active life care management cases; revised goals are identified if indicated by documentation.

Evaluation of Completed Surveys:

1. Returned surveys are reviewed and shared with the staff on a periodic basis.
2. Data from the surveys is analyzed utilizing the outcome measurement report tool.
3. Data from the organizational efficiency measures are analyzed utilizing the outcome measurement tool.
4. Corrective action plans are formulated as needed.
5. Outcome data/corrective action plans are incorporated into strategic planning process.
6. Information is shared with consumers through publication of an annual report/newsletter.

The following are sample efficiency measures from the surveys/questionnaires we elicit from our clients in the areas of life care planning report process, settlement/arbitration, and trial/deposition testimony.

Survey #1 Life Care Plan

This survey requests information on our performance in the areas of life care planning; some examples are:

- Was the report useful for settlement negotiation, trial and/or arbitration?
- Did the clinical referral to physician, therapists and/or academic personnel contribute to the preparation of your case?
- Did the report address future life care needs, costs and/or nursing practice issues required for litigation?

Survey #2 Settlement/Arbitration

This survey requests information on our abilities to convey the essence of the client's health care needs; some examples are:

- Was the Life Care Plan assistive in defining the parameters of long term care needs?
- Did the Life Care Plan clearly itemize future care and costs for your client?

- Was the Life Care Plan easy to follow, thereby contributing to the presentation of your case?

Survey #3 Testimony

This survey requests information related to testimony in court, depositions, guardianship, orphan's court and specialized hearings:

- Presentation of Life Care Plan and related information.
- Accessibility for preparation and testimony.
- Helpfulness during case preparation.

The following are sample efficiency measures from the surveys/questionnaires we elicit from families and fiduciary individuals in regard to case management/care coordination services.

Survey #1 Families

- Did goal setting at team meetings address relevant issues?
- Did you have sufficient opportunities to participate in decision making of health care related issues of yourself/your family member?
- Was the life care coordinator responsive to your needs?

Survey #2 Families

- Was your child's and family's quality of life improved?
- Does the home care program meet your needs?
- Are your suggestions incorporated into your child's program?

Survey #3 Case Management/Life Care Coordinator Funders

- Are the Life Care Coordination reports useful for maintaining a clear understanding fo case status and

effectiveness of recommended services?

- Has communication regarding status of the case provided in an ongoing timely manner?
- Has resource material/information regarding case services been provided when indicated?

Summary

In summary, it is imperative that any professional organization monitor the quality of their service or product through the use of an appropriate outcome measurement process/system. Quality is an individual, subjective perception of a service or product. Attempts to assess and improve the quality of a service implies the ability to be able to identify quality and recognize any variations in quality. In order to remain successful and continue to thrive, it is imperative that an organization be able to collect, organize, analyze, and appropriately utilize information specific to their service. “You can’t equate information with knowledge. Information is simply a group of facts. Turn information into knowledge by analyzing the data, identifying patterns and relationships, and working to gain insight into what the information implies.” (cited in Alfaro-LeFevre, 1999, p.156).

References

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