

THE BENEFIT OF A PHYSIATRIST IN A SKILLED REHABILITATION SETTING

The changing landscape of healthcare, and specifically skilled nursing facilities, has required a change in clinical care. Skilled nursing facilities require the assistance of their medical directors and primary care physicians to handle a patient's general medical issues. By adding a physiatrist to actively manage the rehab patients, a nursing rehab facility is then enhancing care and restoring a patient's function to be able to discharge safely home. Regular and routine communication between a physiatrist and the patient's primary care physician (or mid-level provider) allows for greatest clinical care of the patients.

Physiatrists are physicians who specialize in physical medicine and rehabilitation. Physiatrists specialize in restoring optimal function to people with injuries to the muscles, bones, tissues, or nervous system, such as stroke victims. They assess patients for functional deficits and work with the rehab team to both minimize disability and maximize independence. The rehab team sets goals appropriate to the patient and family's needs and works to eliminate any barriers impeding transition to home or a more home-like environment.

In order to do so, a physiatrist will use longstanding and time-honored physiatry principles including medical knowledge of the pathology and pathophysiology of diseases and trauma that may lead to physical and cognitive impairments and assessment of physical, cognitive and behavioral aspects of people with acquired and congenital disabilities, with an eye toward preservation and/or restoration of function. They use an evidence-based model of the use of physical agents, activity, repetition, and neuromuscular re-education that can restore function; prescription of pharmacological agents; technology (such as prosthetics); and physical agents, to minimize pain and disability. They focus on maximizing independence by encouraging incremental improvement toward self-efficacy, and have the ability to counsel patients and families at a time when they are in crisis due to a loss of independence.

Traditionally, physiatry has been linked to medical rehab units in hospitals and inpatient rehab facilities (IRF). Over the past decade and more intensely over the past five years, there has been a steady decline of patients being approved for inpatient rehab stays by Medicare. Through payer regulatory changes and certain determinations, these patients who would have been approved for an IRF are now being discharged to a skilled nursing facility (SNF).

Rehabilitation in the SNF environment is rapidly emerging as the predominant level of post-acute rehabilitation care in the United States. More patients will receive their rehabilitation in a skilled nursing facility today than in an inpatient rehab facility, and the trend is likely to continue.

Physiatrists tend to follow patients closely throughout their rehabilitation. Because of this close relationship with the patient, the physiatrist may recognize a change in a patient's condition before the nursing staff or primary physician does. In some cases, the physiatrist may suggest changes (elimination of medication leading to an adverse side effect, for example). In other cases (e.g. early identification and treatment of a urinary tract infection) may lead to the patient being able to continue rehab uninterrupted. Both of these examples demonstrate physiatrist interactions that tend to reduce likelihood of hospital readmission, a goal of most organized systems of healthcare.



A physician adds years to a patient's life. A physiatrist adds life to a patient's years. Having the best of both worlds is ultimately the best solution.

Integrated Rehab Consultants (IRC), the nation's largest group of physiatrists (physical medicine and rehab specialists), is proud to announce a new partnership with Consulate Healthcare of North Strabane, a leading provider of rehabilitative and long-term healthcare services. IRC has ongoing partnerships with Consulate Healthcare facilities in multiple markets and states. Dr. Kendall Kessler, MD, PM&R, from IRC has been assigned as the dedicated physiatrist for the North Strabane care center as of December 2, 2015. He has many years of experience in the area of physical medicine and rehabilitation and will seek to enhance the clinical care at Consulate Healthcare of North Strabane.



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