

Help Discharged Patients Stay Home: Reduce Readmissions

Patient Safety Organizations (PSOs) have been designated by the Affordable Care Act to help hospitals improve high rates of readmission. Even if a facility's readmission rates are not noted by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) as "high," the facility can still work with a PSO to reduce their readmissions. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) offers resources to PSOs and facilities looking to improve these rates.

ECRI Institute believes that planning for a patient's discharge should begin as early as possible during his or her hospitalization. Moreover, discharge planning for each patient should take place in such a way that the patient's likelihood of readmission is assessed and mitigated through follow-up care efforts. The patient and his or her family and other non-hospital caregivers should be actively involved in the discharge plan. Likewise, hospital caregivers must agree on a course of action for the patient to take upon discharge and should communicate this plan to the patient's primary care practitioner and other caregivers as needed. That way, a continuum of care for the patient is supported, and the likelihood of the patient's unnecessary readmission is reduced.

ECRI Institute PSO offers a free tool ([click here](#)) that can be used to create a discharge planning checklist; members of ECRI Institute PSO can access the entire discharge summary tool, as well as handoff communications resources, [here](#).

AHRQ offers PSOs, as well as individual hospitals or clinicians, additional information and tools that can be used to evaluate possible reasons for—or the appropriateness of—the organization's readmissions. These include a toolkit to strengthen communication between clinicians and patients and to help institute policies for follow-up after discharge, as well as tools to help organizations reduce readmissions of elderly patients. AHRQ also provides an exchange where users can submit their own experiences and share tools that they developed.

The impetus to reduce readmission rates increases significantly this month, as Medicare reimbursement penalties begin to take effect. While the goal of the penalties is to make healthcare organizations focus on discharge planning and follow-up care, there are concerns. Some facilities that are being penalized desperately need the resources they're losing to enact follow-up plans. Additionally, other organizations' readmissions rates are mistakenly being implicated as the sole measure of their quality of care.

Nevertheless, inadequate discharge planning raises many safety issues, and therefore it deserves the close attention of organization leadership. Approaches should accommodate all discharge scenarios, including those involving patients with no local family, support structure, or caregivers. Potential approaches that have been emphasized in the literature include:

- ✓ Enhanced assessment at the time of admissions
- ✓ Early discharge planning and providing a discharge plan in writing
- ✓ Education, including teach-back, with attention paid to the patient's first language, health literacy, and culture
- ✓ Better communication between healthcare settings prior to discharge

- ✓ Supporting the patient after discharge, through phone calls, home visits, assistance in making primary care provider appointments and receiving lab test results, and remote monitoring
- ✓ Use of EHR systems to facilitate and support such measures

Discharge practices should be evaluated regularly as well to ensure that they are working effectively.

If the organization participates in a PSO, the PSO can help it to review and strengthen its discharge plans and reduce unnecessary readmissions. PSO analysts can review action plans, root cause analyses, and other protocols to help the healthcare organizations understand their strengths and weaknesses and improve where necessary. For more information on what a PSO, such as ECRI Institute PSO, can offer healthcare organizations, go to <http://www.ecri.org/psa>.



How Can We Help You?

Whether you have questions about the final rule or want to learn more about ECRI Institute PSO and/or support for other PSOs, we would be happy to hear from you. Please contact ECRI Institute at psa@ecri.org or call (610) 825-6000, ext. 5558.