

Eight best-practice strategies for reducing LOS

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Case managers are increasingly involved in initiatives such as core measures and clinical documentation, but the ultimate measuring outcome for case management departments remains LOS. Directors should reiterate teachings and strategies for managing patient LOS to ensure that case managers always stay on top of this crucial function.

The following eight established practices can help your staff stay on target with LOS and even reduce the average time of a patient's visit:

- 1. Perform an assessment on all patients prior to or during an admission.** Early preadmission screening allows case managers to proactively prepare for postacute needs by securing patient placement in a skilled nursing facility, rehab unit, etc. Additionally, advance planning allows for patient preparedness and education.
- 2. Frequent/early family contact.** To ensure cooperation from family members, case managers should keep families informed throughout every step of a patient's stay and discharge. For difficult cases, case managers should hold family meetings early and frequently.
- 3. Physician rounds.** Daily contact with physicians is essential to determine the status of the care plan and for making timely adjustments to any changes in a patient's condition. For physicians with unconventional working hours, case managers should establish a creative means of daily communication that meets both of their needs.
- 4. Communication with staff nurses.** Staff nurses often hold critical information that case managers need to complete their knowledge of a patient's case. Daily rounds, morning huddles, and/or communication on patient boards are valuable ways in which case managers and nurses can communicate to foster a sound and timely discharge.
- 5. Communication with other members of the team.** Because case managers oversee patients throughout the continuum of care, it is important to establish daily communication with staff members who come and go throughout the workday, such as physical therapists, respiratory therapists, and dietitians. Keeping all members of the team informed is critical for a timely discharge.

Eight best-practice strategies (cont.)

- 6. Peer consultation.** Peer-to-peer consultation sessions between multiple case managers are an opportunity for various levels of experienced case managers to provide input and manage a case together. This can be accomplished on a one-to-one basis or in a meeting of the entire case management department to discuss complex cases with prolonged LOS.
- 7. Priority setting.** An on-target LOS is often the direct result of the case manager's ability to schedule tests, procedures, and consults in a sequence that allows for rapid return and interpretation of results.
- 8. Anticipating physician behavior.** By identifying trends in a physician's practice, such as rounding habits and preferred methods of communication, the case manager can proactively prepare for the physician's involvement. This helps promote appropriate LOS.

By promoting these eight practices, directors of case management can help their staff stay focused on LOS management.

Additionally, directors should consider holding weekly meetings during which case managers take turns presenting complex cases to the staff for input and support. They can also make LOS status reports available to the entire department.

Lastly, consider incorporating these eight practices into your case manager's yearly evaluation process. This will help establish best practices and consistency among staff members.