Safe Transitions
Best Practice Measures
for Home Health Agencies

Setting-specific process measures focused on cross-setting communication and patient activation, supporting safe patient care across the continuum
MEASURE:

Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies

MEASURES:
The best practice measures for home health agencies are eleven (11) process measures:

1. Risk assessment for hospital admission completed
2. Targeted interventions implemented for high-risk patients
3. Patients educated about seeking assistance for worsening symptoms
4. Medication reconciliation completed at the start of care assessment, re-certification, resumption of services and after doctor or emergency department visits
5. Medication adherence and regimen changes assessed at each home visit
6. Follow-up appointments completed within 14 days of hospital or skilled nursing facility discharge
7. Structured communication used for clinical questions to physicians
8. Real-time verbal information provided to emergency department or hospital clinicians, if needed
9. Clinical information sent with emergency department referrals
10. Summary clinical information provided to outpatient physician(s) at discharge
11. Responses to patient questions provided in a timely manner

PURPOSE:
The best practice measures are intended to improve provider-to-provider communication and patient activation during patient transitions between any two settings. Home health agencies can use these measures to evaluate performance and implement targeted improvement to: 1) improve partnerships with inpatient and outpatient providers, 2) improve patient experience and 3) reduce unplanned utilization.

Some of these processes are adapted from interventions proven to improve care transitions outcomes, such as hospital readmission, in the medical literature. Others are based on national campaigns and standards.

POPULATION:
Varies by measure, but generally includes all patients in home health care

CARE SETTING:
Home health agencies

RECIPROCAL MEASURES:
In addition to the best practices for home health agencies, Healthcentric Advisors developed five (5) additional sets of setting-specific measures, for:

1. Community physician offices
2. Emergency departments
3. Hospitals
4. Nursing Homes
5. Urgent care centers
NOTES:
Because these measures are intended to set minimum standards for all patients, no sampling guidelines are provided. Providers who cannot calculate the measures electronically may wish to implement a representative sampling frame to calculate performance on an ongoing basis. Providers may also wish to implement small-scale pilots to measure baseline performance and implement targeted improvement strategies before expanding efforts facility wide. For those seeking assistance, Healthcentric Advisors provides consultative services related to quality improvement, measurement and care transitions.

MEASURE SET HISTORY:
These measures were developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. The measures have since been updated. This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., primary care providers) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, these measures may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Risk assessment for hospital admission completed

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #1)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies complete risk assessments for hospital admission for all patients. Hospital admissions are a significant source of patient and family stress, high costs and poor quality of life.1 Given the frailty and medical co-morbidities of the home health population, all patients are at higher risk than most other individuals for hospital admission. Identifying patients at the highest risk for admission allows for implementation of targeted interventions, possibly preventing an unnecessary hospitalization.

Risk factors to be identified in the assessment for hospital admission may include: recent decline in mental, emotional or behavioral status; history of falls (more than two in the past year or any fall with an injury in the past year); frailty indicators (e.g., weight loss, declines in physical function, self-reported exhaustion); recent hospitalizations; and polypharmacy (five or more medications).

NUMERATOR:
During start of care assessment and at re-certification, documentation of:

- Risk status,
- Patient without an identified caregiver, or
- Patient with cognitive impairment

DENOMINATOR:
All patients

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
Caregiver: A person who provides care and support to the patient.

Cognitive impairment: Documented diagnosis of cognitive impairment or dementia; or decreased ability to participate in care due to mental status, as assessed by the home health clinician.

High-risk status: Identified during risk assessment. High risk factors may include:
- Recent decline in mental, emotional, or behavioral status,
- History of falls (≥2 in the past year or any fall with an injury in the past year),
- Frailty indicators (e.g., weight loss, decline in physical function, self-reported exhaustion),
- ≥2 hospitalizations in the prior 12 months,
- Polypharmacy (5+ medications),
- Other factors as appropriate (e.g., socioeconomic status, health literacy, and medications like warfarin, insulin, and opioids).

Re-certification: Occurs 60 days after the first visit.
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Risk assessment: Completion of a risk assessment tool (such as OASIS-C items M1032 and M1034) that captures high-risk criteria for hospital admission.

Start of care assessment: Occurs at the first clinical visit to the patient’s home.

NOTES:
None

CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities: Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care
Promoting effective communication and coordination of care

Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance

Care Setting: Home health agencies

Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients

Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail

Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)

Measure Type: Process measure

Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Targeted interventions implemented for high-risk patients

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #2)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies implement interventions for patients at highest risk for hospital admission. Given the frailty and medical co-morbidities of the home health population, all patients are at higher risk than most other individuals for hospital admission. Identifying patients at the highest risk for admission allows for implementation of targeted interventions, possibly preventing an unnecessary hospitalization. Targeted interventions may include: front-loaded visits; telehealth; rehabilitation services; or scheduled calls on days with no visits.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation of implementation of targeted interventions for high-risk patients within 24 hours of the start of care assessment and re-certification

DENOMINATOR:
All high-risk patients

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
Interventions: Targeted strategies to reduce patients’ specific risks for hospital admission, for example:
- Front-loaded visits,
- Telehealth,
- Rehabilitation services, or
- Scheduled calls on days with no visits

High-risk status: Identified during risk assessment. High risk factors may include:
- Recent decline in mental, emotional, or behavioral status,
- History of falls (≥2 in the past year or any fall with an injury in the past year),
- Frailty indicators (e.g., weight loss, declines in physical function, self-reported exhaustion),
- ≥2 hospitalizations in the prior 12 months,
- Polypharmacy (5+ medications), and
- Other factors as appropriate (e.g., socioeconomic status, health literacy, and medications like warfarin, insulin, and opioids).

Re-certification: Occurs 60 days after the first visit.

Start of care assessment: Occurs at the first clinical visit to the patient’s home.
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NOTES:
None

CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities: Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care
Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agency
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Patients educated about seeking assistance for worsening symptoms

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #3)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies educate patients about seeking assistance for worsening symptoms. Early recognition of changes that indicate a worsening condition allows for interventions and treatments that may help to prevent unnecessary hospitalizations. Self-management skills can enable patients, and their families and caregivers, to recognize “red flag” symptoms that should prompt reaching out for help. Assessment of the patient’s understanding of the education provided is a key part of this process and may be accomplished using strategies like “teach-back.”

NUMERATOR:
Documentation that all three of the following occurred at the start of care assessment and re-certification:
• A home health agency phone number was provided to the patient, family, or caregiver, and
• The patient, family, or caregiver was educated about when and how to seek assistance for worsening symptoms ("red flags") and
• Evidence that the patient, family, or caregiver’s understanding of the education provided was assessed

DENOMINATOR:
All home health patients

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
Caregiver: A person who provides care and support to the patient.
Home health agency phone number: A phone number that connects the patient, family, or caregiver: (1) to a clinician who can answer questions about their care, or (2) to an answering service through which a clinician will return the call within 30 minutes.
Re-certification: Occurs 60 days after the first visit.
Start of care assessment: Occurs at the first clinical visit to the patient’s home.

NOTES:
Communication with patients should incorporate concepts of health literacy and cultural competence, and should adhere to interpreter requirements, per state and Federal law.
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CLASSIFICATION:

National Quality Strategy Priorities: Ensuring that each person and family are engaged as partners in their care
Promoting effective communication and coordination of care

Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance

Care Setting: Home health agency

Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients

Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail

Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)

Measure Type: Process measure

Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:

This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:

2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:

22 May 2013
MEASURE:
Medication reconciliation completed at the start of care assessment, re-certification, resumption of services and after doctor or emergency department visits

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #4)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies perform medication reconciliation at the start of care assessment, re-certification, resumption of services and after a doctor or emergency department (ED) visit.

Medication errors are common, and studies have shown that medication reconciliation is associated with decreased risk for adverse drug events.5,6,7 Medication reconciliation is a Joint Commission patient safety goal and can help home health providers identify potential medication errors. This process also allows home health providers to understand which medications to stop, start or adjust after a patient experiences a transition in their care. Studies demonstrate that medication errors are relatively common at hospital discharge (occurring among 14% of elderly patients) and are associated with a higher risk of poor outcomes and hospital readmission.8

NUMERATOR:
Documentation of medication reconciliation at the start of care assessment, re-certification, resumption of services, and after doctor or ED visits

DENOMINATOR:
Patients receiving skilled nursing services or medication management services

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
Medication reconciliation: The process of 1) reviewing the patient’s current medication regimen (name, dose, route, frequency, and purpose) and comparing it with what the patient is actually taking (including non-prescription medications) to identify and resolve any discrepancies; and 2) providing an updated list to the patient.

Re-certification: Occurs 60 days after the first visit.

Resumption of services: Restart of home health care services after interruption for hospital utilization.

Start of care assessment: Occurs at the first clinical visit to the patient’s home.

NOTES:
None
Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures

CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities: Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care
Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agency
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Medication adherence and regimen changes assessed at each home visit

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #5)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies assess medication adherence and regimen changes at each home visit.

Successful medication management is an important factor in reducing hospitalizations. Studies estimate that one in five patients discharged from the hospital to home experience an adverse event within just three weeks, and that two-thirds of these adverse events are drug-related events that may have possibly been avoided. Assessing adherence at each visit may help identify adverse effects, difficulty in obtaining a particular medication or unaddressed concerns about a regimen. Inquiring about regimen changes helps the home health provider maintain an up-to-date medication list and can identify new potential errors or drug interactions.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation of assessment of medication adherence and medication regimen changes at each home visit

DENOMINATOR:
Patients receiving skilled nursing services or medication management services

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
Medication reconciliation: The process of 1) reviewing the patient’s current medication regimen (name, dose, route, frequency, and purpose) and comparing it with what the patient is actually taking (including non-prescription medications) to identify and resolve any discrepancies; and 2) providing an updated list to the patient.

Re-certification: Occurs 60 days after the first visit.

Resumption of services: Restart of home health care services after interruption for hospital utilization.

Start of care assessment: Occurs at the first clinical visit to the patient’s home.

NOTES:
None
CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities:
- Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care
- Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agencies
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Follow-up appointments completed within 14 days of hospital or skilled nursing facility discharge

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #6)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which patients complete any follow-up appointment with their primary care provider or a specialist within 14 days of hospital or skilled nursing facility discharge.

Although improved communication among home health agencies, nursing homes and community-based primary care providers can help to transmit important clinical information when patients are discharged, many primary care providers (or specialists) do not fully assume responsibility for recently discharged patients until a follow-up appointment occurs. The follow-up appointment is important for the provider to: 1) assume professional responsibility for patient care, 2) assess and facilitate adherence to discharge instructions and medications, and 3) elicit any patient questions. Aiming to complete this appointment within 14 days of hospital or skilled nursing facility discharge minimizes gaps in care and helps to ensure that problems developing after discharge are identified and treated promptly.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation that patient completed a physician follow-up appointment within 14 days of hospital or skilled nursing facility discharge

DENOMINATOR:
All patients discharged from a hospital or skilled nursing facility

EXCLUSIONS:
Patients who decline to have a physician visit scheduled for any reason

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None – see exclusions

DEFINITIONS
Discharge: Patient discharged from hospital outpatient observation, hospital inpatient admission, or a skilled nursing facility.

Physician follow-up appointment: An office visit with an outpatient primary care provider, relevant specialist, or the physician signing the home health orders.

NOTES:
For patients seen in the emergency department and discharged home, consider reviewing discharge instructions and assisting with any recommended physician follow-up visits.
CLASSIFICATION:

National Quality Strategy Priorities: Promoting effective communication and coordination of care  
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance  
Care Setting: Home health agency  
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients  
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail  
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)  
Measure Type: Process measure  
Target Population: All patients in home health care  

MEASURE HISTORY:

This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:

2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:

23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Structured communication used for clinical questions to physicians

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #7)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies use structured communication for clinical questions to physicians about home health patients. Given the frailty and medical co-morbidities of the home health population and the busy workday of most primary care providers, efficient and effective communication is especially important. Home health agencies need a framework to quickly and accurately convey information about worrisome signs or symptoms that may lead to an emergency department visit if not promptly addressed.\(^1\)

Tools for structured communication, such as SBAR\(^2\), provide a foundation for more effective and consistent transfer of information from a home health nurse to a provider in a community physician office. Nurses and physicians are trained to communicate in different ways; use of structured communication can help to bridge these different communication styles and ensure that patient information is shared in a concise format. Structured communication improves patient safety because clinicians can communicate with each other with a shared set of expectations.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation of use of structured communication, such as SBAR, and a “triage protocol”

DENOMINATOR:
All verbal communication with physician offices

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
SBAR: Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation; a communication framework for inter-provider discussions to ensure that high-urgency concerns are addressed efficiently.

Triage protocol: Formalized goals for expected response timeframes from a physician office, based on the urgency of the clinical question.

NOTES:
Home health agencies might find it helpful to develop a formal physician communication policy—a written policy that is part of new-hire and occasional recurring staff training.
Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures

CLASSIFICATION:

National Quality Strategy Priorities: Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agency
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:

This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:

2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:

23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Real-time verbal information provided to emergency department or hospital clinicians, if needed

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #8)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies respond to emergency department (ED) and hospital clinicians’ verbal requests for time-sensitive clinical information at the time of the initial call or within one hour. Timely and adequate information transfer is an important component of safe patient transitions between care settings and has been linked to improved patient experience and outcomes. The Transitions of Care Consensus Conference recommends timely communication between the sending and receiving providers involved in a patient’s care.\textsuperscript{13} Although many clinicians recognize the importance of communication during care transitions, all groups acknowledge that communication is often inadequate.\textsuperscript{14}

NUMERATOR:
Documentation that if an ED or hospital clinician called the home health agency, one of the following occurred:
• A conversation between the ED or hospital clinician and a home health staff member at the time of the initial call, or
• A return phone call from a home health staff member within 1 hour of the ED or hospital clinician’s phone call to the home health agency

DENOMINATOR:
All patients whose care requires phone calls from the ED or hospital to the home health agency for time-sensitive clinical conversations

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
ED or hospital clinician: Physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant or nurse who is taking care of the patient.
Home health staff member: Clinical or clerical staff who can address the ED or hospital clinician’s specific question.
Time-sensitive clinical question: Whether or not a patient’s care “requires” a conversation and in what timeframe is a subjective determination left to the ED or hospital clinician’s discretion, with the understanding that outreach is intended to be limited to situations where information is needed quickly to inform the patient’s care.

NOTES:
None
Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures

CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities: Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agency
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Clinical information sent with emergency department referrals

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #9)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies send clinical information to the emergency department (ED), when referring a patient for evaluation.

Timely and adequate information transfer is an important component of safe patient transitions between care settings and has been linked to improved patient experience and outcomes. The Transitions of Care Consensus Conference recommends timely communication between the sending and receiving providers involved in a patient’s care.

ED clinicians express a desire to have pertinent, up-to-date clinical information accompany patients who are sent in with a specific concern by another healthcare provider. This information transfer allows ED clinicians to more effectively focus their work-up and management strategies, without repeat testing or duplication of other services, and ensures that the home health nurse’s specific concerns are adequately addressed.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation of provision of clinical and contact information by the referring home health agency to the ED and the outpatient physician office:

- ED: Within 1 hour of patient referral for ED evaluation, and
- Physician office: Within 1 hour of patient referral for ED evaluation or the next business day if the patient is referred following an after-hours phone call with the home health agency

DENOMINATOR:
All patients

EXCLUSIONS:
Patients who go to the ED without first notifying the home health agency

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None – see exclusions

DEFINITIONS
After-hours: Outside of the standard home health agency business hours (8:00am to 5:00pm, seven days a week).

Clinical information: Verbal or written information that includes the clinical complaint/problem, main reason for referral to the ED, and medication list, when possible.

Contact information: A phone number that connects the ED to home health agency staff who can address an ED clinician’s question.

Outpatient physician: The patient’s primary care provider and the physician signing the home health orders, if different.

Provision: Via email, phone, fax, remote access to medical record or other electronic means.
NOTES:
Home health agencies are not required to send this information to the outpatient physician office if a clinician from the office was involved in decision to refer the patient to the ED.

If the home health agency becomes aware of an ED visit in which the patient self-referred, the agency should also notify the physician office.

CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities: Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agency
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:

**Summary clinical information provided to outpatient physician(s) at discharge**

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #10)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies send summary clinical information about the episode of care to primary care providers (PCPs) and relevant specialists when patients are discharged from home health services.

Timely and adequate information transfer is an important component of safe patient transitions and has been linked to improved patient experience and outcomes. Because of their unique clinical role and work in patients’ homes, home health nurses may elicit important symptoms, historical information or social issues that directly impact patients’ health care but are unknown to the PCP. Effective transfer of this information, along with an updated medication list based on what is present in the patient’s home, prevents important issues from being inadvertently dropped after home health care has been discontinued.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation that summary clinical information was sent to the physician office(s) within 72 hours of patient discharge from home health, including:

- Patient’s current functional status
- Ongoing clinical or pertinent social issues
- A medication list and
- Home health agency contact information

DENOMINATOR:
All patients receiving skilled nursing services, skilled therapy services, or medication management services

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS

Contact information: A phone number that connects the physician office to home health agency staff who can address the office’s question.

Outpatient physician: The patient’s PCP and the physician signing the home health orders, if different.

Sent: Transmitted from the home health agency to the physician office via fax, email or other electronic means.

NOTES:
None
CLASSIFICATION:
National Quality Strategy Priorities: Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance
Care Setting: Home health agency
Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients
Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail
Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)
Measure Type: Process measure
Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:
This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:
2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:
23 May 2014
MEASURE:
Responses to patient questions provided in a timely manner

MEASURE SET:
Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies (Best Practice #11)

MEASURE DESCRIPTION:
This measure estimates the frequency with which home health agencies respond to patient questions in a timely manner, when the agency is contacted outside of a home visit.

The Home Health Quality Improvement National Campaign\(^1\) directs home health agencies to educate patients to call the agency first with questions or concerns—before the patient takes a potentially avoidable trip to the emergency department. In order to accomplish this goal, home health agencies must return patient phone calls in a timeframe that both meets patient expectations and is logistically feasible for the agency.\(^2\) The process of instructing patients to call the home health agency first is typically done within the context of developing an overall emergency plan for the patient that details what types of symptoms need to be reported and to whom.

NUMERATOR:
Documentation of a response to patient, family, or caregiver questions that occur outside of a home visit:
- Via phone call within 30 minutes, and
- If necessary, via a visit within 24 hours

DENOMINATOR:
All patients

EXCLUSIONS:
None

RISK ADJUSTMENT:
None

DEFINITIONS
Caregiver: A person who provides care and support to the patient.
Response: A phone call or home visit from a home health staff member who can answer clinical questions about the patient’s care.

NOTES:
None
Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures

CLASSIFICATION:

National Quality Strategy Priorities: Ensuring that each person and family are engaged as partners in their care
Promoting effective communication and coordination of care

Actual or Planned Use: Quality improvement with benchmarking; contracting; pay for performance

Care Setting: Home health agency

Patient Condition: Not applicable – all patients

Data Source: Medical record or electronic audit trail

Level of Analysis: Practitioner, unit, facility or community (e.g., health system or state)

Measure Type: Process measure

Target Population: All patients in home health care

MEASURE HISTORY:

This measure was developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. It has since been updated.

This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) and obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agency) and their community partners (e.g., PCPs) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors). This quality improvement process was deemed exempt by the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Institutional Review Board. As a quality improvement project that incorporated local preference, this measure (and the other Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures for Home Health Agencies) may not be generalizable to other states and regions, but can inform the development of local standards.

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MEASURE DEVELOPED:

2009

MEASURE LAST UPDATED:

23 May 2014

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Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures

SELECTED SOURCES:

**Safe transitions best practice measures for home health agencies**

These measures were developed by Healthcentric Advisors, the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Rhode Island, using a multi-stage stakeholder consensus process. This process involved: 1) reviewing the medical literature (where it exists) and national campaigns and standards, 2) collecting input about community preferences, 3) drafting measures, and 4) obtaining input (measure content and feasibility) and endorsement from the targeted provider group (home health agencies) and their community partners (e.g., primary care providers) and stakeholders (e.g., state agencies and payors).

Selected sources from Steps #1 (the medical literature, national campaigns and standards) and #2 (community preferences) are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year</th>
<th>Discharge Setting</th>
<th>Intervention or Observation</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Related Best Practice Measure(s) for Home Health Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boling PA, 2009¹</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Description of Care Transitions and Home Health Care</td>
<td>Care transitions are hazardous for patients and require providers to consider patient and family needs in addition to assuming responsibility for the medical care plan in place.</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgar et al., 2011²</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Review of emergency department medication lists</td>
<td>Emergency department medication lists are not always accurate and measures are needed to support ED providers in obtaining and communicating accurate medication histories.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman et al., 2009³</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Provided a transitions coach to help improve patient education and self-management in the 30 days after hospital discharge</td>
<td>Using the Care Transitions Intervention (CTI) chronically ill hospitalized patients and their caregivers to take a more active role in their care reduced rates of hospital readmission. The coaching tenets include assessing patient comprehension and helping patients use a personal health record, understand their condition, perform medication reconciliation and undertake recommended follow-up.</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Safe Transitions Best Practice Measures

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doran et al., 2009&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Assessed the burden of safety indicators among Canadian home care clients utilizing the RAI-HC© assessment tool</td>
<td>Falls and emergency room visits were the most frequent adverse outcomes, based on the assessment tool responses. Safety factor findings from this study can be addressed by providers and health systems in order to decrease adverse events and care transitions.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillespie et al., 2010&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ED and nursing home</td>
<td>Beliefs about communication between nursing homes and EDs</td>
<td>ED and nursing home clinicians who were surveyed felt important information was lost when patients were transferred between settings but varied by setting on what information should be available. All supported a role for verbal communication.</td>
<td>8,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Health Quality National Initiative., 2011&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Best Practice Intervention Packages</td>
<td>The Home Health Quality Improvement (HHQI) National Campaign has best practice packages dedicated to improving the quality of care provided to home health patients.</td>
<td>1-4,6,11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack et al., 2009&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Multifaceted package of discharge services</td>
<td>Use of a nurse discharge advocate during hospitalization and a pharmacist post-discharge decreased ED visits and readmissions.</td>
<td>3,4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Commission, 2013&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Developed “National Patient Safety Goals”</td>
<td>Along with other patient safety goals, the Joint Commission outlines expectations for medication reconciliation in the emergency department and hospital.</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard et al., 2004&lt;sup&gt;9&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Review of the role and importance of effective teamwork and communication in care</td>
<td>Failures in communication, which lead to unanticipated adverse events, can be prevented through effected teamwork and communication, as well as through the incorporation of standardized communication tools (i.e SBAR).</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Method / Description</th>
<th>Evidence / Findings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mills and McGuffie, 2010&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Systematic medication reconciliation by a pharmacist</td>
<td>Medication error rates were high before the intervention and decreased significantly afterward; medication reconciliation was more timely after the intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mueller et al., 2012&lt;sup&gt;11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Summarizes available evidence and effective methods for medication reconciliation process</td>
<td>Found that studies comparing the effect of medication reconciliation processes on clinical outcomes are rare. The available evidence suggests a focus on pharmacy staff and high risk patients is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Transitions of Care Coalition, 2011&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Bundle of seven essential interventions applicable for any setting</td>
<td>This bundle of essential care-transition intervention strategies, applicable for any provider and any care transition, includes descriptions and examples of medication management, transition planning, patient and family engagement/education, information transfer, follow up care, healthcare provider engagement, and shared accountability across providers and organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Quality Forum, 2010&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Includes 34 Safe Practices for Better Healthcare that have been demonstrated to be effective in reducing the occurrence of adverse healthcare events, including poor care transitions</td>
<td>The Safe Practices include recommendations for medication reconciliation and for discharge systems. Discharge systems must have: a “discharge plan” prepared for each patient at the time of hospital discharge, including a scheduled follow-up appointment; standardized communication that occurs between the inpatient and outpatient clinicians; and the confirmed receipt of summary clinical information by receiving providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodgers et al., 2008&lt;sup&gt;14&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Examines front loading visits, a best practice measure to decrease rehospitalization in heart failure patients</td>
<td>This study showed front loading home health visits was effective for patients with heart failure, decreasing rehospitalization by more than one half (30.4% to 16%). In addition to reducing hospitalizations, early and frequent supervision of patients considered to be at risk can also improve patient satisfaction and compliance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanderson et al., 2008</td>
<td>This article discusses the fundamentals of ACH risk assessment, emergency planning, and teletriage and experiences of two home care agencies</td>
<td>Planning and goal setting allows patients to self-identify early changes in their condition and how to seek assistance before hospitalization is required. This early identification and appropriate follow through can lead to better outcomes and reduces hospital admissions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow et al., 2009</td>
<td>Developed consensus policy statement about care transitions</td>
<td>Co-authored by many physician professional societies, including the Society of Hospital Medicine; establishes principles and standards for managing transitions, including timely communication among providers and patient involvement. Suggests establishing local and national standards for continuous quality improvement and accountability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft et al., 2005</td>
<td>Examines the causes of deaths and hospitalizations of home care patients using a retrospective medical record audit</td>
<td>Identifies risk factors for hospitalizations include wound deterioration and falling accidents. Also, the authors found that nearly 21% of hospitalizations in the study could have been prevented and they identify areas for process improvements to be discharge planning, patient monitoring and symptom reporting and interdisciplinary communication and coordination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wick JY</td>
<td>Description of the teach-back technique</td>
<td>The teach-back technique is a three-part process which involves assessing comprehension, offering feedback and re-evaluate comprehension.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

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**LAST UPDATED:**  
23 May 2014
KEY:
1. Risk assessment for hospital admission completed
2. Targeted interventions implemented for high-risk patients
3. Patients educated about seeking assistance for worsening symptoms
4. Medication reconciliation completed at the start of care assessment, re-certification, resumption of services and after doctor or emergency department visits
5. Medication adherence and regimen changes assessed at each home visit
6. Follow-up appointments completed within 14 days of hospital or skilled nursing facility discharge
7. Structured communication used for clinical questions to physicians
8. Real-time verbal information provided to emergency department or hospital clinicians, if needed
9. Clinical information sent with emergency department referrals
10. Summary clinical information provided to outpatient physician(s) at discharge
11. Responses to patient questions provided in a timely manner

REFERENCES:


