

Follow-up after hospitalization for mental illness

Patients should see an outpatient psychiatric or behavioral health specialist within 7 to 30 calendar days of discharge after hospitalization for mental illness. Proper follow-up care is associated with lower rates of rehospitalization and with a greater likelihood that gains made during hospitalization are retained. Hospitalization may stabilize individuals with acute behavioral conditions, but timely and appropriate continued care is needed to maintain and extend improvement outside of the hospital. The period immediately following discharge from inpatient care is recognized as a time of increased vulnerability. Ensuring continuity of care by increasing compliance to outpatient follow-up care helps detect early post-hospitalization medication problems and provides continuing support that improves treatment outcomes and reduces healthcare.²

Measure

Patients 6 years of age and older who were hospitalized for treatment of selected mental health disorders and who had an outpatient visit, an intensive outpatient encounter, or partial hospitalization with a mental health practitioner. Two rates are reported.

1. The percentage of patients who received follow-up within 30 days of discharge
2. The percentage of patients who received follow-up within 7 days of discharge³

What to look for

If a patient mentions that they were recently hospitalized for mental illness, ask him or her if they have appropriate (7 days and 30 days post discharge) follow-up appointments made with a mental health provider.

Tips for provider and/or staff when talking to the patient

- Remember, when physicians and other providers recommend follow-up care, most patients comply.
- After a patient in your primary care practice is hospitalized for a behavioral health diagnosis, it is important to ask whether a follow-up behavioral health appointment is scheduled. If so, encourage the patient to schedule and keep that appointment.
- Encourage your patient that there is no stigma for having a mental health diagnosis and that consistent follow-up care is very important.

¹ HEDIS is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, "National Quality Measures Clearing House," accessed Sept 2, 2014, <http://www.qualitymeasures.ahrq.gov/content.aspx?id=46995&search=hospitalization+for+mental+illness>

³ Peter Bach et al. HEDIS 2014 Technical Specifications for Health Plans (National Committee for Quality Assurance 2013), 181–183