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Ways Skilled Nursing is Standardizing to Improve Care

Streamlining the SNF for a Data-Centric World

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The unpredictable nature of the current environment is forcing providers to ensure that their care leads to positive, measurable outcomes for their residents and patients.

That may seem like a daunting task for operators: After all, how can any given building prepare for every possible patient with every possible set of health issues, especially with the new challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. But thanks to technology, operators are increasingly turning to standardized processes designed to streamline frontline caregivers' decision-making, giving them more time to focus on care.

This white paper will explore the ways that forward-thinking SNFs have developed and executed on standardized care processes, and how those initiatives can improve the resident, family, and employee experience.

01

Standardizing Operations:
Aligning Assessments with Outcomes

AVAMERE

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PointClickCare customer Avamere have changed their workflows and invested in tools that allow them to standardize care delivery across settings.

Avamere Family of Companies is a group of independent privately owned post-acute care companies.

Avamere operates in over 300 locations across 20 states with over 8,800 employees.

No two individual patients are alike, but with new payment models and operating during a current pandemic, the way that facilities structure their operations needs to be uniform – because both resident outcomes and a company's financial viability will rely on it.

Now with COVID-19, the initial resident assessment will be vital, with the primary diagnosis informing the reimbursements that the operator receives for the care provided. Even missing one or two conditions could lead to a serious reimbursement loss – which many operators can't afford amid high staffing costs and razor-thin margins.

That's why providers such as the Avamere Family of Companies, which operates a range of senior housing and care facilities in the Pacific Northwest, have changed their workflows and invested in tools that allow them to standardize care across settings.

They've developed a standardized process for their employees, with an eye on making sure that every worker knows his or her role to ensure nothing gets missed. In pre-COVID days, it was already difficult to get the primary diagnosis from the referring hospital, but now it's more important than ever for facilities to standardize their pre-admission process in order to receive all the important information and have it readily available to their care teams.

02

Standardizing Care Delivery
Pathways to Better Results

Once a facility has standardized its operations around resident assessments, leaders can move onto standardizing care delivery, a strategy that doesn't mean providing 'one size-fits-all' care, but rather allowing technology to do the heavy lifting.

For some organizations, it can be as simple as making sure everyone across the continuum is on the same page. Avamere operates skilled nursing, senior living, and home health platforms, making the seamless sharing of EHR data vital to monitoring residents as they move through the different settings. "It's important that across the continuum everyone understands the same processes, and when we have an organization where we have different types of business lines, we are able to float the chart between the business lines," says Paula Love, Director of Clinical Informatics at Avamere.

Having a system that generates evidence-based care pathways based on the resident's initial assessment can give your care team the insights they need to deliver efficient, repeatable, quality care. This idea of a pathway, a concrete set of steps that clinicians and other staffers can follow for the treatment of a specific condition, has gained traction as a key strategy for thriving under COVID-19. Armed with the correct diagnosis and the right plan for maximizing both resident care and reimbursements, care pathways provide a clear path forward.

At Avamere, that pathway to care has a color coding: red, yellow, and green, depending on the severity of the issue, with a corresponding action to take. If a resident has shortness of breath, for instance, a nurse can find the specific pathway to resolving the issue, from increasing oxygen to contacting a physician to increasing routine medical reviews.

"While data collection and analysis can help operators develop benchmarks to track their progress, it's not enough to just know whether a certain resident's outcome is above or below average, providers need to use those benchmarks to drive continuous care improvement, primarily by establishing strict standards and following those pathways," Brian Buys, Senior Director of Clinical Product Management at PointClickCare, says.

> In a value-based environment, we don't play that game anymore. It's not good enough to be as good as everyone else. We need to be better.

Brian Buys
Senior Director of Clinical
Product Management | PointClickCare

03

Standardizing the Resident Experience:
Removing Care Roadblocks

While ensuring proper reimbursements is important – after all, a property can't operate without being paid for its services – resident care remains paramount, and any standardization effort should have the resident experience in mind.

At face value, the two ideas may seem in competition: How can standardizing processes actually lead to better care?

By taking advantage of care pathways, technology, and other streamlining processes, Buys argues that operators are making it easier to place the patient front and center.

"A lot of people hear the word standardization and they assume it means depersonalizing care," Buys says. "In fact, it's quite the opposite. When we use technology to drive standard work, we're letting technology handle the tedious work of gathering and summarizing disparate information and letting caregivers deliver great care." Much of the inefficient time spent searching for, summarizing and documenting information can now go directly toward resident care.

Instead of spending time determining the proper actions to take, a nurse can spend time answering family members' questions. Instead of being buried in paperwork, a director of nursing can look at predictive analytics to see which patients might need more attention, and which diagnoses may need more attention from frontline caregivers. Instead of searching for the primary diagnosis on incomplete documentation submitted by a hospital, a therapist can provide targeted care tailored precisely to her patient's exact medical needs.

"We know that we are the workflow engine for this particular market, and in particular the nurse," Bill Stuart, VP, Clinical Product Strategy at PointClickCare, says. "Rather than workflows just being dictated by regulation, we're actually looking at what tools we can put in place to help the nurse deliver better patient care."

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> — Brian Buys
> Senior Director of Clinical Product Management PointClickCare

Standardizing is Essential:
Molding to A New Environment

Too often, according to Stuart, operators tend to look at hospitals and payers as their ultimate customers, since they're the entities that dictate payments and other quality benchmarks.

But, by developing standardized care plans and focusing on the most efficient path to quality outcomes, operators can ultimately focus on the real customer, the resident, and the real goal: improving the resident's quality of life. Machine learning, proactive alerting, and predictive analytics are all possible with standardization and technology, but it all starts with a focus on the resident.

"The first phase of that is really instilling this standard work piece as a means to improve patient care, and then secondly, to drive value from a data perspective," Stuart says.

Standardizing in a data-centric world is now crucial more than ever in a pandemic. In order to streamline your nursing process, you need to enable your staff to achieve better workflow efficiency.

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