By employing best practices during discharge and other care transitions, hospitals can reduce the risk of readmission penalties, shorten length of stay, enjoy improved efficiencies and support robust patient care.
20% of hospitalizations are followed by readmission within 30 days.

90% of readmissions are unplanned.

Studies of Rehospitalizations: Reducing Avoidable Hospital Readmissions. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD.
BY THE NUMBERS

75% or 4.4 million, of Medicare readmissions may be preventable.

These readmissions hurt the bottom line – to the tune of $12 billion per year in Medicare spending.

Report to Congress: Promoting Greater Efficiency in Medicare, MedPac (Medical Payment Advisory Commission), Washington D.C.
It’s easy to point a finger at one group within the hospital for readmissions. However, it’s often process and communication failures throughout the entire health-care system that lead to avoidable readmissions and the costly penalties associated with them.
NEARLY ___ % of medical errors involve miscommunications during patient transfers and handoffs.

A  50%  C  70%
B  60%  D  80%
This illustrates the crucial need for effective, accurate and timely information at discharge to prevent wasteful spending and improve patient care.
It used to be that hospitals were not held accountable for patients after discharge. However, that has changed as a result of the **Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program** and related regulations that started penalizing hospitals for preventable readmissions.

**A HOSPITAL’S EVOLVING RESPONSIBILITY**

Project Detail: Hand-off Communications, August 2009, Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare, Naperville, IL.
In 2013, **more than 2,200 hospitals** were penalized **$227 million** in Medicare fines through HRRP due to excess readmissions.

This amounts to 0.3% of total Medicare base payments to hospitals—**a major hit to the bottom line**—and a number that is **increasing in 2014**.
Regulations outlined by CMS’ Meaningful Use incentives have underscored the need for hospitals to improve post-discharge communication.

These incentives require hospitals to engage the patient and deliver a Transition of Care summary when the hospital hands the patient off to another provider or care setting—demanding more resources of an already strained system.

As CMS continues to intensify its initiatives, hospitals must actively seek ways to improve communication between and across settings to avoid steep financial penalties associated with preventable readmissions.
By employing the following 3 key strategies during care transitions, hospitals can comply with new care model requirements and avoid increasing readmission penalties—ultimately protecting your organization’s financial health.
Communicate more than just clinical information.
A key element in limiting readmissions is how well a hospital transitions a patient from acute to post-acute care, whether to the patient’s home, a rehabilitation or skilled nursing facility or another setting.

**Strong, interactive communication is therefore essential.**
Electronic health records (EHRs) and health information exchanges (HIEs) have improved communication efficiency across different settings; however, these tools focus on sharing clinical information—diagnosis, treatment plans, medication lists and so on.

While necessary, clinical information alone may not be sufficient for a patient, family and post-acute provider to fully appreciate how to keep the patient on track.

Families and providers need to understand more than just the medical aspects of the patient’s health to grasp the processes necessary to ensure the patient receives the care he or she needs.
Through an EHR, a post-acute provider might know a patient’s:

Medical History

Current Medications

When the hospital has scheduled a follow-up appointment

However, what the provider may not know is that the particular patient:

Has a history of medication noncompliance

Tends to skip follow-up appointment

Doesn’t have transportation to get to the pharmacy or doctor’s office
Without communicating these important processes and recommending interventions, the hospital puts the patient at substantially higher risk for experiencing a preventable readmission.
Finding ways to share information about care process needs, as well as clinical data, is key to supporting care transitions that set the stage for optimal patient care and reduced length of stay.
EXPAND YOUR REACH to non-medical providers
To effectively facilitate care transitions, hospitals may need to **reach beyond traditional medical providers** to make sure patients and post-acute care organizations have **all the resources they need to complete care plans**.

A home-bound patient without family support may need transportation to get to appointments or pick up prescriptions.

Patients with diabetes or congestive heart failure may have specific nutritional needs that they cannot meet on their own; necessitating in-home, non-medical assistance with meal preparation or grocery shopping provided by an organization like Home Instead Senior Care.
Reaching out to non-medical providers to supply transportation, deliveries, cleaning and other services is an effective way to fill care gaps.

Whether using manual methods of outreach or automated technology solutions, hospitals can coordinate essential nonmedical resources and services to ensure patients are able to effectively follow their care plans.
LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY to manage large patient populations and maximize staffing resources.
To manage the discharge process for a large patient population, **hospitals typically stratify patients by risk, including their risk for readmission.**

Many EHRs stratify risk based on conditions at the time of admission; however, this approach assumes care provided while in the hospital or following discharge has no effect on a patient’s readmission risk.

Instead, **hospitals should employ technology that provides a holistic view of the patient** and recalculates readmission risk at the point of discharge and at different stages throughout the patient’s recovery.
A patient who misses a follow-up appointment 72 hours after discharge should be at higher risk for readmission than a patient with a similar diagnosis who attends the appointment and receives care from the physician.

By identifying patients whose risk for readmission is increasing during post-acute care, providers are able to intervene appropriately and manage a larger population of patients.

Likewise, if patients are following their care plans, their risk may decrease and therefore require less staff intervention from the provider.

Source: The Advisory Board
Through risk stratification, hospitals can direct highly technical, low-touch interventions to low-risk patients, while aiming low-tech but high-touch staff resources at higher risk patients.

Source: The Advisory Board
A 25-year-old woman who is discharged from the hospital, expected to make a full recovery and goes home to a supportive family will be identified by the hospital as a low risk for readmission. By leveraging an automated discharge process or using technology solutions such as texting or direct messaging, the hospital can effectively engage the patient without consuming staff resources.

A 90-year-old high-risk patient with little family involvement who is being transferred to a skilled nursing facility is less likely to engage in high-tech, low touch solutions. The best way to reach this patient is through a care provider, family member, phone call or personal visit—all of which require staff intervention.
With staffing shortages and an influx of medically complex patients, there often aren’t enough care coordinators or discharge planners to efficiently manage care transitions, leaving some patient populations vulnerable to preventable readmissions and other negative outcomes.

By employing technology solutions that maximize resources and streamline communication during care transitions, hospitals can ensure vital care needs follow patients throughout their care journey. This not only enables better continuity of care and patient outcomes, but reduces the risk of avoidable readmissions and associated penalties.
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Our care coordination solution is uniquely powered by scalable technology and supported by human resources to help you 24/7. **What’s in it for you?**

- An automated discharge process to reduce length of stay
- Mean referral response time of 28 minutes
- The only no-cost network of more than 100,000 post-acute providers with 90% participation
- The ability to track a patient’s readmission risk and get real-time alerts to initiate interventions
- Insight into which post-acute facilities are readmitting most often and under what conditions
Discharged home without any 28
be preventable, according to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. Nearly 80 percent of medical errors involve miscommunications during patient transfers and handoffs. It used to be that hospitals were not held accountable for patients after discharge. However, that has changed as a result of the Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program and related regulations that started penalizing hospitals for preventable readmissions. In 2013, more than 2,200 hospitals were penalized $227 million in Medicare fines through HRRP due to excess readmissions. In 2013, more than 2,200 hospitals were penalized $227 million in Medicare fines through HRRP due to excess readmissions.

Preventing Readmissions through Effective Care Transitions
The following are three key strategies for framing care transitions to support robust patient care and improved efficiency across the continuum.

1. Communicate more than just clinical information.

   Communication is therefore essential. Fully appreciate how to keep the patient on track. Families and providers need to understand more than just the medical aspects of the patient's health to grasp the processes necessary to ensure the patient receives the care he or she needs.

2. Leverage technology to manage large patient populations.

   Technology can provide a holistic view of the patient and recalculates readmission risk at the point of discharge and at different stages throughout the patient's recovery. This requires hospitals to engage the patient and their families in understanding the plan of care and what is expected of them post-discharge. Hospitals should employ technology that provides a holistic view of the patient and recalculates readmission risk at the point of discharge and at different stages throughout the patient's recovery.

3. Deliver a Transition of Care summary.

   This requires hospitals to engage the patient and their families in understanding the plan of care and what is expected of them post-discharge. Hospitals should employ technology that provides a holistic view of the patient and recalculates readmission risk at the point of discharge and at different stages throughout the patient's recovery.

It is estimated that 30% of Medicare patients who are discharged home with a plan of care return to the hospital within 30 days. This is an unwarranted expense to the patient and the health care system. Preventable readmissions are estimated to cost $227 million to Medicare hospitals in 2013 alone.

For instance, through an EHR, a post-acute provider might know a patient's medical history, current medications and when the patient is due for follow-up appointments. Referring back to the previous example, a home-based patient whose risk for readmission is increasing during post-acute care, providers are able to intervene appropriately and in a timely manner. In this scenario, a home-based provider can notify the patient of the upcoming follow-up appointment and make sure patients and post-acute care organizations have all the resources they need to complete care plans.

To manage the discharge process for a large patient population, hospitals typically stratify patients by risk, including whether a patient is at high risk or low risk of readmission. High-risk patients are further stratified into highly technical, low-touch interventions to low-risk patients. Through risk stratification, hospitals can also direct resources at higher risk patients.

As discharge staff member, it’s critical to prepare the patient for discharge not just the patient, but also involving the patient’s family in the discharge process. Families and providers need to understand more than just the medical aspects of the patient’s health to grasp the processes necessary to ensure the patient receives the care he or she needs.

$227 million

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