

## Early Physiatric Intervention on Hospital Readmission and Healthcare Costs

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### DESCRIPTION

Physiatry, also known as Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM and R), is a medical specialty devoted to the diagnosis, treatment, and holistic management of patients with physical impairments or disabilities. It emphasizes the restoration of functional ability and quality of life to those suffering from physical limitations stemming from injury, illness, or chronic conditions. While physiatry may not receive the same public attention as surgical or emergency medicine, its role is profoundly essential in modern healthcare, particularly in the context of aging populations, rising chronic diseases, and increasing survivorship from trauma and major medical interventions.

A physiatrist's work is broad and deeply integrative. They treat a wide range of conditions involving the nervous, musculoskeletal, and cardiovascular systems. These include but are not limited to spinal cord injuries, brain injuries, stroke, cerebral palsy, amputations, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain syndromes, and degenerative joint disease. They are also involved in sports medicine, occupational injuries, and pediatric rehabilitation.

A distinguishing aspect of physiatry is its reliance on a multidisciplinary model. Physiatrists collaborate closely with physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, social workers, and orthopedic surgeons to deliver cohesive care. This team-based structure is instrumental in managing complex cases that demand continuous support and adaptation. For example, a stroke survivor may require coordinated interventions to address mobility, speech, cognition, emotional resilience, and reintegration into the workforce or home environment. The physiatrist often serves as the orchestrator of this intricate care plan, ensuring that treatments are synchronized and aligned with the patient's overall functional goals.

Technological innovations such as robotic exoskeletons, brain-computer interfaces, neuromodulation therapies, and wearable devices are being integrated into rehabilitation protocols. These tools are augmenting traditional therapies and providing real-time feedback, remote monitoring, and adaptive programming that is revolutionizing how care is delivered. The physiatrist plays

a pivotal role in evaluating the suitability of these technologies, customizing interventions, and measuring outcomes. Moreover, data analytics and predictive modeling are being applied in physiatric practice to forecast recovery potential and guide individualized treatment plans. Such developments reinforce the value of physiatry as a forward-thinking, technologically adaptive specialty that remains rooted in patient-centered care.

One of the more compelling roles of the physiatrist is in the prediction and planning of long-term care needs. As healthcare systems struggle to contain costs and improve outcomes, there is growing emphasis on preventing hospital readmissions, minimizing complications, and optimizing rehabilitation. Physiatrists, by virtue of their comprehensive evaluations and longitudinal relationships with patients, are uniquely suited to anticipate future functional outcomes. This allows them to guide resource allocation, recommend assistive devices, suggest home modifications, and identify psychosocial support networks that are critical for successful community reintegration. Their expertise in functional prognosis makes them essential partners in discharge planning, insurance appeals, and medical-legal assessments.

Physiatry also champions the principles of inclusion and accessibility. It advocates for equitable access to care, especially for marginalized populations such as individuals with developmental disabilities, older adults with frailty, or people living in remote or under-resourced communities. Rehabilitation medicine stresses that disability is not merely a medical issue but a social one shaped by physical environments, societal attitudes, and policy frameworks. As such, physiatrists are often involved in advocacy, research, and policy development to ensure that healthcare systems accommodate diverse needs and promote dignity for all individuals, regardless of ability.

Medical education is beginning to recognize the importance of rehabilitation principles. As future physicians face the dual challenges of chronic disease management and aging populations, exposure to physiatric philosophy can deepen their understanding of patient-centered care, interdisciplinary collaboration, and long-term functional planning. Medical students who rotate through PM and R departments often express appreciation for the specialty's integrative approach, humanistic values, and emphasis on real-world recovery rather than laboratory findings alone.

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