Chapter 4

How Do Physical Therapists Use Outcome Measures to Measure Outcome Status?

Outcome status is the impact of care on patient/client health over time. Outcome measures quantify the changes in impairments in body functions and structures, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, and the changes in health, wellness, and fitness that are expected as the result of patient/client management. A number of personal factors and contextual factors may have an impact on outcome status. Throughout the entire episode of care, the physical therapist—in collaboration with the patient/client, family members or significant others, and caregiver(s)—determines the goals and related outcome status.

Establishing Baseline

The use of standardized tests and measures early in the episode of care establishes the baseline status of the patient/client, providing a means to quantify change in patient/client functioning. Beginning with the patient/client history, the physical therapist identifies patient/client expectations, perceived need for physical therapy services, personal goals, and desired outcome status. The physical therapist then considers whether the goals and desired outcome status are realistic in the context of the findings of the examination data and the resulting diagnosis. Based on this information, the physical therapist generates a prognosis intended to predict likely outcomes in the relevant domains of the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability
and Health (ICF), \(^1\) given the diagnosis and the unique patient/client characteristics (eg, age, sex, prior health status).

When standardized tests and measures are used to determine change in status after an intervention, they may be referred to as outcome measures. The physical therapist selects the appropriate standardized tests and measures as outcome measures to quantify patient/client status prior to termination of an episode of care. Outcome measures also may be used to determine status and assess change in risk reduction/prevention and health, wellness, and fitness.

Standardized outcome measures used throughout the episode of care as part of periodic examination provide information regarding whether outcome measurement expectations are being realized. If expectations are not being met, the physical therapist determines whether the plan of care requires modification and whether the initial prognosis requires reconsideration.

**Outcome Measurement at Termination of Episode of Care**

Prior to termination of the episode of care, the physical therapist measures the patient/client outcomes. Although outcome measures are expected to identify change in functioning, the physical therapist considers changes to the environment in the effort to ensure that the change in functioning can be accurately attributed to the intervention. For example, a person may return to work not only because his or her functioning has changed, but because there may be monetary or family pressures.
Standardized tests and measures, including outcome measures, foster a common language to evaluate the success of physical therapist management among different patients/clients, thereby providing a basis for comparing outcomes related to different intervention approaches and perhaps different clinical settings, diagnosis categories, and patient/client populations. The review of outcomes in each relevant domain among patients/clients with the same diagnosis—and the use of data analysis—are the foundation for determining which particular intervention approaches constitute “best clinical practice.”

**Self-Report Measures Versus Performance-Based Measures**

Outcome measures can be self-reported measures or performance-based measures. Both types of measures can be standardized with reported psychometric properties. The findings from a self-report measure and from a performance-based measure for the same activity may be different in the same patient/client. The difference between these 2 types of measures reveals a distinction between patient/client perceived or self-measured ability to perform a task or activity and the clinically or professionally measured performance of a task or activity. Some measures are more suited to self-report or can be performed only via self-report, such as confidence or satisfaction. Other activities are appropriately measured as a performance-based measure, such as a standardized walk test. Many measures, such as physical fitness, involve both self-report and performance-based testing based on a number of factors, including cost, availability, access, patient acuity.
Psychometric Properties

The appropriate selection of outcome measures for a specific patient/client depends on the clinical utility and psychometric properties of the measure. Outcome measures can include measures of health or functional status, clinical measurements, adverse outcomes and complications, morbidity and mortality, patient/client-reported outcomes, and patient/client satisfaction with care.

References