

Maintenance Therapy and Episodic Care Tip Sheet

What is a maintenance program?

A maintenance program is a program established by a therapist that consists of activities and/or mechanisms that will assist in maximizing or maintaining the progress that has been made during therapy, maintaining current level of function or to preventing/slowing further deterioration due to a disease or illness.

When to consider a maintenance program:

- If skilled therapy services do not meet criteria for rehabilitative or habilitative therapy, then it may in some circumstances meet criteria as maintenance therapy.
- If the member has reached the maximum benefit of therapy, there is very limited progress over an extended period, or progress has slowed or stopped, and documentation supports that ongoing skilled therapy is required to maintain the progress made or prevent deterioration.
- If documentation clearly demonstrates an ongoing need for education, periodic adjustment of the home program or regular modification of equipment to meet the member's needs.

Under what circumstances would a maintenance program be considered reasonable and necessary?

- If focus of therapy is to either maintain the member's current level of function or prevent/slow further deterioration rather than gain new or recently lost skills due to injury or disease.
- If specialized skill, knowledge, and judgment of a licensed therapist is required to establish a maintenance program or carry out treatment activities as opposed to repetitive exercises, activities or stretching that can be rendered by a caregiver or nonskilled individual.
- If skilled services are required for periodic reevaluations or reassessments of the maintenance program.
- If ongoing skilled instruction to the member or appropriate caregiver regarding the maintenance program is needed.
- If a member's special medical complications require the skills of a licensed therapist to render specific procedures to maintain current function or slow/prevent further deterioration.

What is needed for a maintenance program to meet medical necessity?

- Documentation demonstrating why the specialized judgment, skills, and knowledge of a licensed therapist is reasonable for the safe and effective delivery of services in the maintenance program.
 - Procedures utilized to maintain the member's current function or prevent/slow further deterioration must be of such complexity and sophistication that the clinical reasoning of a licensed therapist is required to furnish the procedure safely and effectively.
- Documentation that clearly specifies the request is for maintenance therapy as opposed to rehabilitative or habilitative and why a maintenance program is needed.
- A plan of care that is consistent with maintaining current function or slowing/preventing further deterioration rather than requiring measured progress. (Medical necessity does not depend on the presence or absence of the member's potential for improvement from skilled intervention.)

Episodic Care Tip Sheet

What is episodic care?

- Periods of focused intervention targeting emergent needs, followed by therapy breaks (a definitive beginning and end).
 - Therapy might occur for a few weeks or months to improve functional abilities and acquire new skills while continually monitoring progress.
 - During breaks from therapy, goals are addressed at home to maintain functional gains, allow additional progress, and promote translation of skills across multiple environments.
- Depending on the level of impairment and member needs, episodic care may include long, or short/intense bouts of treatment followed by a therapy break.
- Research shows that therapy sessions are as effective when planned and grouped as episodes of care.

When to consider episodic care:

- When a member has a lifelong or chronic health condition. Lifelong conditions do not necessitate lifelong skilled occupational, physical or speech therapy.
- When skill attainment has slowed or stopped. After a series of sessions, it is normal to see a member's skills level off and change less between visits.
- When the skills of a therapist are no longer required because the home program is at a level that can be managed by the member or responsible adult (practice of repeated activities and the same assistance session to session).
- When the therapy plan requires infrequent updates regarding education or adjusting the plan of care.

What is needed for successful episodic care?

- Realistic plan and expectation for discharge based on skill assessment at the start of care. This includes establishing and updating a home exercise program from the start of care.
- Once skills of a therapist are no longer needed (due to goal attainment and/or minimal to no progress over reasonable amount of time), a solid home program that empowers the member or caregivers to incorporate skills into home routines.
- Ongoing client/therapist communication/relationship for check-ins and/or home programming updates, if needed. Regression is NOT the expectation of episodic management of therapy.

Helpful hints/reminders:

- Breaks in care provide an opportunity for members to focus on other aspects of life, re-energize, and spend more time practicing skills at home, school, or in the community, etc., rather than attend ongoing treatment with no foreseeable end.
- When a member leaves episodic care, it does not mean they are discharged forever.
- Episodic care helps foster independence, prevent decline, and promote long term management of health and wellness in individuals with chronic conditions.

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