



## Medically Complex Patients on the Rise: Is Your Rehab Program Ready?

Rehab programs will experience a major influx of medically complex patients, including those with neurological conditions, in the coming decades. The drastic increase is being spurred by an aging population. For instance, stroke prevalence is expected to rise by 21% by 2030, and more than 1.2 million citizens are projected to have Parkinson's disease.<sup>1,2</sup>

**This leaves rehab leaders with one significant question: What can be done to prepare for the increase of medically complex patients?** By evolving to meet the needs of this changing population, rehab programs can successfully meet the challenge, providing patients with the highest level of care while achieving greater performance standards.

In this whitepaper, we'll examine the three areas that drive the greatest impact on treating medically complex patients:

- Clinical staff
- Tech innovation
- Patient and family member experience

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## Getting Your Staff Prepared Clinically

A mistake many rehab programs make is trying to serve this new medically complex patient population with the same staffing model that they have used in the past. Unless staffing models are optimized for the new population, it can lead to operational inefficiencies and subpar outcomes. Positions that are particularly important for treating medically complex patients are:



### Rehab-Certified Nurses

Unlike standard medical nurses, rehab-certified nurses are trained to help patients with disabilities and chronic illnesses achieve maximal functional improvements. They are educated to understand the treatments and systems used specifically in rehab environments. This expertise translates to faster recovery for patients and more efficient programs.



### Speech and Language Pathologists

Speech and language pathologists play an important role in helping patients reach optimal functionality. For instance, receiving speech therapy early in the rehab process is most effective at treating aphasia, which is present in up to 38% of stroke patients.<sup>3</sup> Research finds that more intensive therapy typically correlates with better outcomes.



### Clinical Liaisons and Certifications

A key part of optimizing the efficacy of your rehab program is providing the right level of care at the right time. Highly-trained clinical liaisons are needed to achieve optimal timing of rehab entry. CARF and Joint Commission certifications also enhance patient access by expanding the range of patients a program is able to treat, and improving performance. On average, CARF-accredited programs experience a 26% increase in annual patients served.<sup>4</sup>

## Adapting Through Tech Innovation

By embracing new technologies, rehab programs and their patients can reach new levels of performance.

### Upgrades to Develop Best-in-Industry Brain Care Centers

Technology is vital to developing leading rehab programs that stand out within the market and deliver the best outcomes. Robotics are among the tools making the biggest impact for the changing patient population.

For instance, BIONIK InMotion robots physically guide brain injury patients through tasks by supporting their arms.<sup>5</sup> As patients progress, the robots decrease their levels of physical support, thereby adapting to patient capabilities. BIONIK's robots are effective for treating patients who have suffered strokes, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and other neurological conditions.

Other emerging technology that is benefiting medically complex patients includes exoskeletons, and even robotics that aid in surgical procedures. Exoskeletons can provide a speedier path to recovery and functionality.



## Positioning Patients for Positive Outcomes

### The Power of a Phone Call

Working follow-up calls into standard discharge procedure can produce optimal outcomes for both patients and rehab programs. For instance, brain injury patients who receive follow-up calls are more likely to consistently take medication. They are also more likely to attend clinic visits, which correlates with reduced readmission risk.<sup>1</sup>

Follow-up calls give patients and their caregivers the opportunity to ask questions and resolve any misunderstandings. Nurses are able to review medications and rehab tasks, repeat instructions, advise on new problems and confirm future appointments.

### Supporting the Adult Child Caregiver

For most medically complex patients, an adult child takes on the role of caregiver. Initiatives to support the caregiver can help rehab programs reduce readmissions and improve patient outcomes.

There are a variety of initiatives that can be used to support caregivers:<sup>6</sup>

- **Transitional Support**

Training and preparation for the caregiver as the patient transitions from inpatient treatment to at-home care

- **Educational Materials**

Easy-to-understand content that addresses the appropriate phase of the patient's care journey

- **Case Managers**

Dedicated staff who serve as the caregiver's contact person

- **Peer Support Groups**

A space where caregivers can find emotional support among their peers and learn relevant coping skills

- **Mobile App Technology**

Apps, specially designed for rehab, are allowing patients and their families to set goals, track progress and share updates. These apps keep patients and caregivers engaged throughout the rehab journey.

While the rapidly evolving patient population is challenging, rehab programs can thrive by adapting their programs to meet the growing demand. Developing rehab-specific expertise around key areas including staffing, patient and caregiver experience and tech innovation can enable rehab programs to reach new levels of success.

### Optimizing Your Program

KHRS is the largest diversified provider of rehab therapy in the country. Our deep clinical expertise, access to the latest rehab data, and innovative technology enables rehab programs across the country to reach new levels of clinical and operational success. To learn how KHRS can help your rehab program prepare for the changing patient population, visit [www.kindredrehab.com](http://www.kindredrehab.com).

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